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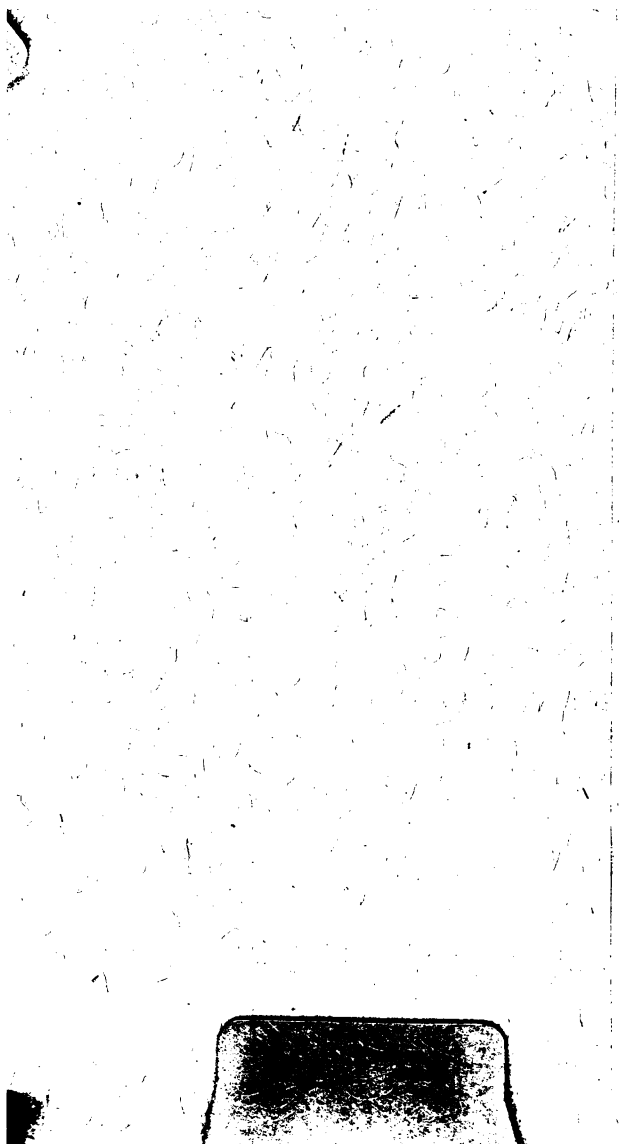
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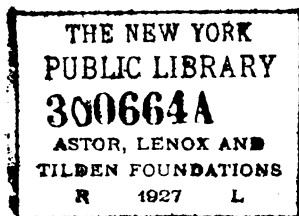
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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ROSAMUND,	1
II. A BORN DESPOT,	8
III. LORD HARTLAND'S WILL,	20
IV. LADY JULIA FINDS A REMEDY,	28
V. NO ADVANCE MADE,	38
VI. ROSAMUND AS A CONTRAST,	47
VII. TWO TONGUES LET LOOSE,	59
VIII. IT WAS HIS BOAST THAT HE WAS A LADIES' MAN,	73
IX. THE FIRST MEETING,	85
X. UNSKILLFUL TACTICS,	94
XI. "IN YOUR PLACE I SHOULD NOT HAVE PRESUMED,"	104
XII. GILBERT IN A NEW LIGHT,	121
XIII. "IS HE A FIT HUSBAND FOR YOUR DAUGH- TER, THEODORE?"	131
XIV. HARTLAND'S RESOLUTION,	139
XV. HE WAS THE SYMBOL OF HER TRIUMPH,	153
XVI. "YOU CAN'T MEAN THAT?"	166
XVII. THE REACTION BEGINS,	179
XVIII. "I WHO STOOD UP SO BRAVELY FOR HIM ONCE!"	190
XIX. THE CAGED BIRD,	211

CHAPTER	PAGE
XX. MAJOR GILBERT'S CASE,	226
XXI. TEMPEST,	237
XXII. "IT MAKES ME MAD WITH ROSAMUND,"	249
XXIII. GILBERT UNDOES IT ALL,	262
XXIV. TO-DAY SHE CARED FOR NO ONE,	276
XXV. A MISERABLE HOUR,	289
XXVI. "ANY OTHER COURSE WOULD BE UN- WORTHY,"	301
XXVII. A HOST ENJOYING HIMSELF,	314
XXVIII. UNCERTAINTY,	328
XXIX. GOOD FUN AT KING'S COMMON,	340
XXX. HAD ROSAMUND BEEN THERE,	354
XXXI. HARTLAND'S MANEUVER,	318
XXXII. THE TRUTH,	382
XXXIII. "JILTED! IT'S AN UGLY WORD,"	397
XXXIV. HARTLAND UNLIKE HIMSELF,	410
XXXV. "PROMISE THAT YOU WILL BUT WAIT,"	422
XXXVI. LADY JULIA'S LITTLE PLAN,	437
XXXVII. SHE HAS HAD HER LESSON,	451

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A STIFF-NECKED GENERATION.

CHAPTER I.

ROSAMUND.

"Is there in the world so inconsistent a creature? Is she not capricious, teasing, tyrannical, obstinate, perverse, absurd? Ay, a wilderness of faults and follies; her looks are scorn, and her very smiles—ah me! I wish I hadn't mentioned her smiles."—SHERIDAN.

ROSAMUND was just eighteen, and no one could have done more justice to that charming age.

It was not only that her eye was the brightest and her step the lightest in the world; it was that the dark eye could flash, and the little foot could stamp, and that,—but the whole may be summed up in one brief word: Rosamund, while retaining many an enchanting trait that was all her own, had, somehow or other, contrived to borrow here and there an imposing quality from a terribly imposing mother.

Of this more anon; for the present, suffice it to say that my heroine was young, warm, and still sprouting upwards as fast as a springing sapling. To the end of her finger-tips she was glowing with vigorous life. Of a morning she awoke like a giant refreshed, armed at all points for whatever the day might bring forth.

If well met and kindly treated by fortune, there she was; if not—why, there also; very much, indeed, there, heedless of consequences, and defiant of the future.

Evils troubled her much, but not long. Afflictions in the shape of restraint and rule were grievous, but *not despicable*; and action in any form was a source of *pure, untempered delight*.

In person Rosamund was straight, supple, and rather over the average height ; her throat and shoulders were round and white, and her arms very beautiful, long, and tapering ; but she swung them as she walked, causing thereby a thunderbolt to fall when, on one occasion, the newly emancipated young lady of King's Common,—the Miss Liscard whose name was supposed to be in everybody's mouth, and whom Lady Caroline, in her somber heart, believed to be creating quite a country sensation,—was beheld by the same astonished parent, steaming along through the home park, all unconscious of ill, at the rate of five miles an hour, the aforementioned long arms swinging like the fans of a windmill.

A year ago such a thing might have been endured,—but now !

Rosamund was, in short, "out,"—and in that little word was summed up an infinity of meaning. She was no longer the source of perpetual excitement and stimulus to what was not precisely the acquirement of knowledge in the school-room ; she was beyond the reach of the overcharged and unsympathetic governess (for which it may be presumed that functionary daily thanked her stars) ; and she was promoted to having her name printed on her mother's visiting-cards. If a tuck had still to be let down in one of her frocks, the tell-tale was ironed out with infinite pains, as though almost an insult had been offered to the young *mademoiselle*, who was now "quite grown up," having passed beyond a mysterious Rubicon in the eyes of the household. If her hair fell loose and lay tumbling in the well-known and formerly unappreciated masses on her shoulders, she was respectfully informed of her misfortune. If her hat and gloves were found on the floor, in passage or landing, they were restored to her room, and reappeared as by magic in the wardrobe and drawer. Nothing she could do now was wrong in this respect. With a single exception, no one *restrained*, no one held her in check,—no one, in fact,

considered her as the same Rosamund they had known hitherto.

One person only tendered no allegiance ; but even Lady Caroline paused and regarded her daughter with attention.

Now Rosamund had never been handsome as a child. As a troublesome school-girl, often disordered by the agitations of her little world, careless of pleasing, and a sloven, in her dress, it had been doubtful whether she ever would possess any looks at all. But on a sudden the scene had changed. Her complexion had freshened, her headaches had disappeared, and she had begun to take pride in her beautiful hair. It had dawned upon her with a sensation altogether novel that she had a nose, a mouth, a chin. She saw that her hands were pretty, but sunburned ; she liked to put a ribbon round her soft throat.

Everything about the child was new and wonderful at this time. With the great event of her emancipation, the world and she had met afresh, and shaken hands upon it. True, her own joyous spirits, warmth of blood, and excellent powers of recovery after suppression, wrath, and wailing, had always borne her along on the high tide of life with a certain zest and force which had made the days fly by fast enough, even when filled with tumultuous mingling of joy and woe,—but still the difference between past and present remained.

Rosamund had now become a personage, while before, her individuality had been merged in that of numbers ; and perhaps in this lay the key to the whole.

To explain how such a thing could ever have been, in the case of one so emphatically unlike those about her, so distinctly and absolutely herself and no one else, it must be explained that there was another and a yet stronger, and, by reason of place and years, a still more dominant nature in the family ; and that nothing had ever been further from Lady Caroline

Liscard's intentions than that any one belonging to her should be recognized as having a mind or a conscience, still less a whim or a fancy, which did not coincide with her own.

If Mr. Liscard did not thus go for absolutely nothing, he was well down in the rating, and was content to be so. Of him all that need at present be said was, that he was a man whom nature had intended to lead an easy-going, peaceable life, in which case he would have been known as an amiable parent, a quiet neighbor, and a very respectable member of society ; but he was plagued by dyspepsia and Lady Caroline, and had grown péevish in consequence. He loved his books, was something of a scholar, and still more of a pedant. To be in communication with literary men now and again, to buy rather so-so editions of valuable works, and unpack the boxes they came in himself, to arrange and rearrange his long rows of shelves, to consult with his carpenter over little alterations and conveniences, and to have everything luxurious, calm, and reposeful in his well-warmed, commodious library, filled up the measure of his desires.

His wife had brought him a large fortune, but he had no wish to have a hand in the disposal of it. It suited her to rule, and it suited him to be—if not ruled, at least let alone, untroubled and unconsulted. Lady Caroline was the very woman for such a husband in many ways, and a shade more consideration, or even a grain more tact, might have given her the place in his heart which she held in his opinion ; but, as it was, he occasionally turned upon her ladyship when she least expected it.

He had, however, no mind that any one else should do so. His languid eye would open wide though his tongue would be mute when any living being ventured to take the field with his hardy dame ; and buried in his correspondence, his reputation, and his digestion, he was as far removed from the rest of the family, even from the very front ranks of his offspring, as

was his imperious spouse, occupied by her determined sway over a chattering neighborhood, a refractory parish, and two households—that of her maiden sister, Lady Julia Verelst, being quite as much under her thumb as her own.

Neither parent had ever deigned to evince the slightest perception up to the present time that any one or other of that unknown herd, yclept the children, had had an individuality of any sort. They had been there, consequently they had had to be provided for—to be fed, clothed, and taught: and the girls had been placed under a governess, and the boys sent to school; and at Christmas-time had come the orthodox tree, with its accompanying dry and solemn party, and in the summer there had been the boys' cricket-matches and the harvest festival; sea-air also after whooping-cough and measles, and extended holidays when these had been recommended by the family doctor.

But it had all been done in the piece, as it were. Where one had gone, all had gone; what had been found beneficial in one case had been unhesitatingly applied to another; no exceptions had been made; and the severance of any single unit from the entire body was the last thing to be thought of. To sum up in a word, nothing would have surprised Mr. Lis-card and Lady Caroline more than to have been told that no two girls and boys of the same age may be reckoned on as having precisely similar feelings and fancies, and to have been made to recognize the amazing fact that among twelve children may be found twelve different minds, consciences, tempers, tongues, and stomachs.

"My dear Rosamund, you must be talking nonsense."

"Mamma, it is quite true. The very things Dolly loves, Catherine detests; and the lessons Dolly cries her eyes out over, Catherine does not mind in the least."

"That is merely because there is two years' difference between them. When Dolly is as old as Catherine, of course she will do as Catherine does."

"But mamma—"

"My dear child, who should know best, you or I? I have given you my opinion of the matter, because you are now old enough to understand,—but there is an end of it. It is my wish that Dolly is advanced to Catherine's standard, directly she attains Catherine's age."

In her new-born license Rosamund had been pleading that this might not be; but she had yet to learn that, great as had been her advance even in her mother's estimation, Lady Caroline still meant to hold her own as she had ever done.

Every one else, however, as we have said, gave in upon the spot. Even Netley, the magnificent Netley, the very tartest of Tartars in the shape of a head gardener—even he culled his choicest blossoms for the fair bosom of the *débutante*; while Ossory, known as Mrs. Ossory—Mrs. Ossory in black satin and spectacles, whom even Lady Caroline treated punctiliously, and whom her master had never presumed to address in his life—even she sent a message in the form of a humble request to see her young lady robed for her first ball. Request! and that from Ossory, who had so many a time and oft ejected almost by force the whole pack of ravening intruders, with Rosamund at their head, when now and again the store-room, with its spicy shelves and odorous repositories, had been subjected to a school-room invasion! And blossoms from Netley, who, with scarce less ceremony, had bidden them begone from his premises, what time the peaches were ripe on the wall and the grapes thick in the houses! It was almost too much. It struck the recipient with a sense of bewilderment that was akin to awe.

It touched and subdued her, when perhaps all aglow and throbbing from joyous open-air exercise,

by chance her whilom despot and preceptress, note how cold and thin felt the poor little cross-woman's hand. A hitherto unknown command and forbearance crept into her heart. The feud died out of it.

mund had never had, it must be owned, affinity arning. Hot rooms had been her bane, the noise of the piano had worn and fretted her and sitting still hour after hour had been a living death.

ounding these aversions with what she had ly supposed to be their end and object, the un- ng pupil had straightway avowed an open with all that her unlucky teacher had held to rst-rate value and importance, and there could one result of such a collision of ideas. Rosa- had been in endless hot water, and had, if the ere told, scarcely cared whether she were in

It had at least been an outlet for her exuber- ergy and ready tongue ; and—must we confess finding everything to her mind, and nearly ne ready to fall down and worship her star ris- on a new world, my heroine, in the absence of opposing force and wholesome friction, was ly in a state to look about for something which to whet her teeth.
was not to look long.

CHAPTER II.

A BORN DESPOT.

"The power which you have o'er us, lies
Not in your race, but in your eyes."

—WALLER.

LADY CAROLINE had an only sister, who, although in point of mere age ten years older than herself, was in everything else as many, or as many again, her junior.

Julia—she was as universally "Julia" as the other was "Lady" Caroline—Julia was unmarried, and still lived at the old family seat, within a few miles of the home to which the youngest daughter had betaken herself on her marriage with Mr. Liscard.

The bride could not have endured, ill-natured folks alleged, to have gone farther away from the stately if somewhat faded and dim glories of Hartland Abbey; could not have borne to have felt herself a stranger where she had so long ruled, and where her sway had indeed been recognized as second only to that of the iron old peer himself.

Some sentiments of the kind, put indeed into another form, had certainly been gathered by Lady Caroline's future husband; and as he was by no means a rich man, and could not unaided have afforded to purchase the spacious adjoining domain of King's Common, then in the market, her ladyship with commendable promptitude, and an eye to the sweets of her position as lady of the manor, had volunteered to become herself the owner of the place.

The investment had been considered a good one; but whether the handsome daughter of the proud Lord Hartland would ever have been by him per-

mitted to throw herself away on a man who could not even be his own landlord, may be a very open question, had not the young lady herself been rather too much of a good thing at the Abbey.

The old lord had had no objection, it is true, to having those about him kept in order beneath the autocratic government of a resolute and determined viceroy ; but when it had appeared that he also was to go Lady Caroline's way and none other, and that her way, as often as not, proved to be exactly opposed to his own, there had ensued stormy weather.

Poor Julia, a gentle creature, as soft and harmless as a puff-ball, would often be going between one and the other half the day ere she could effect terms ; and as she never of herself disobeyed Caroline's mandates, never ventured a reproof, and never was provoked into a sharp word, it was understood on all hands that the sisters were devoted to each other—so much so, indeed, that when the purchase of King's Common had been effected, all difficulties and obstacles removed, and the lease signed, Lady Caroline had had all the conviction of bestowing a delightful assurance, when she could then and there promise that, whatever happened, *whatever* happened—(a widow's cap rose in vision before the eyes of each, created by the emphasis)—she would still be with her dear Julia ; still be at her side, as she had ever been.

If Julia did occasionally wish that, short of the widow's cap, some call or claim might arise, which for a brief period should release her from the constant and unremitting supervision thus frankly promised, she took herself to task for the sigh.

Poor Caroline always meant to be kind to *her*, was always glad to see her, and gave many and touching proofs that she was thought about when absent. If poor Caroline did not infrequently do the very things in the very ways that she, Julia, most disliked, she ought *not* to let herself think too much of it. If *those trifling offenses*, those little annoyances, did

seem to come oftener and oftener as time went on, she fancied it must be she who was growing, with years, more tiresome and foolish, in that she took them more to heart than she had been wont to do. She certainly had begun to feel, in spite of herself, that there was no actual need for her sister's every-other-day's visit to the Abbey ; and that if she did not of her own free will choose to give an account of all she had done and seen since last the two met, it needed not to have been wrung out of her.

She was helpless in Caroline's hands.

It had long been understood that what Caroline meant to know, she would know ; and that what she willed, she would do ; but even after years of submission, the pressure of the time-worn yoke would still occasionally be felt—nay, as we have said, increasingly so.

On the other hand, Caroline loved her. That, in itself, ought to have been sufficient atonement for all—or so she told herself. Caroline loved her. Theoretically, of course, Caroline loved her husband and children ; as a fact, she loved Julia only—and of this fact Julia herself was dimly and sorrowfully aware.

She could not have but wished it otherwise, as the conviction slowly grew in depth and certainty in her own mind ; and perhaps, had her nature been deeper and more reflective, she might have been more troubled. But as it was, Caroline was Caroline, and the position had to be accepted and made the best of.

She, at least, should not be the one to complain. For her, as she gratefully realized, that cold heart had a warm spot ; for her, that unsparing tongue a gentle accent ; and for her, and her alone, was found excuse and apology in the eye of one who never, in any other delinquent, overlooked a blunder, understood an inconsistency, nor forgave an offense.

Julia had indeed been the guardian angel of Lady Caroline's infantile years ; the two motherless little ones had been all in all to each other then ; and if in

honesty it may be suggested that the unselfish and possibly not over-wise affection bestowed on the younger by the most amiable of elder sisters had helped to make of the spoiled child the woman she afterward became, on the other hand it was often speculated as to what Lady Caroline might have been, had there been no Julia—and, as a rule, people preferred to have her as she was, and know the worst.

She was at least, they reflected, vulnerable on this one point. She who simply tolerated those nearest and (presumably) dearest to her—and not always that—was affectionate, almost tender in her manner toward Lady Julia. Her eye would soften involuntarily as her sister's step was heard; a caress bestowed upon their aunt would be regarded with complacency, even if volunteered unseasonably by a boy or girl of her own; and well did all about her know on what grounds to sue for an exemption from or a relaxation of her rules.

For herself, Lady Caroline never broke a rule. The sisters were unlike each other in this as in everything else. Lady Caroline had stated hours for everything; Julia did not know what method meant. Lady Caroline carried a note-book; Julia forgot or remembered as luck helped her. Lady Caroline never indulged in surreptitious summer fires on chilly evenings, never ate between meals, never picked a ripe plum off the bough as she walked in her garden, never sat up a little later than usual at night, nor rose a little later than usual in a morning, never bought a thing she did not want,—never, in a word, did those things she ought not to have done (in her own opinion); and accordingly, her confession of the same, on a Sunday morning in church, must have referred to other matters, with which her everyday life was in no wise connected.

In appearance she was tall and spare, with a handsome nose, eyes set very close together, and a forehead from which a frown was seldom absent.

Severely dressed, and with movements that corresponded with her slow and frigid mental powers, she fancied herself elegant, and would not have moved more quickly nor actively for the world.

Julia, on the contrary, was short, plump, brisk, undignified, lovable. Her little step was frequently a trot, and not infrequently a stumble—for from being somewhat short-sighted, and not very sure of foot, and from a sociable little way she had of turning herself about from one to the other, and bobbing up and down in her chair as anything caught her attention, running forward to meet a new-comer, and wheeling about to find her bag, which was for ever being lost, and invariably contained something good—Julia often came to grief. That, the good creature did not mind in the least. The bag would be opened, and the sweets brought out—behind Caroline's back, if possible; if not, with a deprecating "Really good ones, sister, from our own grocer, so you can not object; they can not do the dear children any harm, I am sure"; and, wonderful to relate, the gift would be permitted, subject only to a faint protest.

Then Julia, who loved nothing better than to potter round from one door to another in the little county town, in the direction of which she drove three or four times a week, and who would shop as long as she had a sixpence in her pocket, would produce further purchases for inspection, and, itching as it was to curl, her sister's disdainful nose would keep free from the temptation. Her idea was that, by not showing contempt, she maintained the dignity of their aunt in the eyes of her children.

Little she knew! They did not care twopence for the little spinster's dignity, and they adored herself.

The girls would tell her their grievances, their escapades, and the misdemeanors of each other; the boys confide their early efforts with cigars, and the results attendant. No mortal man had ever been

bold enough to ask permission to smoke even so much as a cigarette, and that in the open air, in the presence of the unapproachable Lady Caroline. No dusty and footsore pedestrian had ever been known to beg a lift in her carriage, whereas the sight of Julia's grays would be hailed as affording certain deliverance by the humblest of her acquaintance.

In a word, young and old, rich and poor alike, had good-will toward the elder, and but a dubious respect at the outside for the younger; while by the youthful members of the family with whom this story has most to do, the aunt would be fondled, caressed, sought out and confided in, while the mother was only known to be feared and evaded. That she was a mother at all would have almost seemed to be a mistake on the part of Providence.

With children her imperious nature had nothing in common. They troubled her—if she would have let herself be troubled by them. They had to be thought about, and considered for—and her time was already fully occupied. The hours spent at her desk had but the briefest and baldest occasional reference to them, and they were seldom made acquainted with any event in which they had to take part, until the time for action arrived.

Alone, she walked and drove. If business took her to London, as sometimes happened—for even a masterful steward had met his match in her as a mistress, and she looked closely into her investments, and kept an eye on everything in which she held shares, besides making inquiries roundly before she ever signed a lease,—whenever these important affairs required her presence in town, she troubled no one for company.

Her maid and footman would be in attendance, and orders would have been given for the carriage to suit a specified train, and the coachman would have it in black and white what train he was to meet on the following day (for she rarely remained away be-

yond a night), and that would be all that the household, including husband and children, knew of the matter.

"I shall have to go to town to-morrow," Lady Caroline would remark of an evening, after the latter had gone to bed.

"Have you sent word to the stables?" would be Mr. Liscard's reply. And indeed he only desired to know because, if not, it meant his stretching out his hand to ring the bell.

As for offering his own escort, or inquiring into the cause for the journey, neither idea would occur to him. He might, and occasionally did, volunteer a trifling commission—one not attended with difficulty nor trouble; and it would be punctually attended to if all went well otherwise. If not, he knew better than to ask about it.

One specimen of the lady of the manor within her own precincts, and we have done with her; in future she shall speak for himself.

"All alone, Caroline?" Some one peeped in at the door, and a well-known voice made the above inquiry.

Lady Caroline turned round. "You, Julia? Come in. Yes, we shall be alone. I always am, as you know, at this hour."

The sisters embraced.

"I thought that perhaps, now that Rosamond is grown up, she would be your companion in the mornings," began Rosamund's kind aunt, whose delight it was to have any one of the girls, but especially the above-named favorite niece, to "companion" her at the Abbey.

"I prefer being alone when I am busy," replied Lady Caroline calmly. "There is no need for Rosamund to be here."

"Can she not help you at all, my dear? Such a pile of letters—such dreadful-looking documents," and Julia glanced apprehensively at the laden writing-

table. "I have always so longed for a nice little secretary,—but, to be sure, you are so much cleverer than I; you always could manage your own correspondence."

"Yes, my dear, always." Lady Caroline looked also at the heavy pile, but with complacent satisfaction, and no sign of distaste.

"Still it would be nice—such a dear, bright girl," hinted the aunt, who had her own little ideas too, and had been ruminating over the matter in private; "it would be nice, would it not?" she said, and paused.

"What would be nice?"

"To have some one by, my dear, to talk to, and—and consult with; and discuss what has to be done, you know; invitations, you know, and—and arrangements."

If it had been any one but Julia who spoke! As it was, Lady Caroline looked at her sister and faintly smiled. She consult and discuss! She saw herself doing it, and wondered what would be expected of her next?

"Well, well, you understand your own affairs, of course, my dear," hastily amended the docile elder—for, to tell the truth, that smile was sufficient answer for her or for any one. "I perceive you do not mean to make a companion of Rosamund."

"My dear Julia, let us understand each other. I certainly intend to make every difference—every recognized difference—between a daughter introduced into society and those still in the school-room. Rosamund, as you know, is quite taken away from her governess; she has all her meals with us; she has had a complete wardrobe of new things to wear; and she sits up till ten o'clock in the evening. I really do not see what more could be done for her. She has only not been presented at Court, because of our recent mourning, and my severe cold in the spring,—we thought it as well to put that off to another year, as you remember; but apart from that, she has had

everything that others have on such occasions. I have stretched a point to take her to every piece of gayety that has come in our way. Besides which, she will have a season in town next year, unless—unless anything happens in the mean time."

Lady Julia nodded. She understood. Yes, to be sure ; unless anything happened. Caroline and she knew to what that proviso referred.

"Rosamund really does very well," continued Lady Caroline, with what was quite a comfortable, cosy, chatty tone for her. "Come out of the sun, Julia. I am not very busy this morning. I can go on with my writing presently. What I was going to say was, I consider that Rosamund is quite up to the mark as compared with other girls of her age. She is fond of amusement, as I suppose they all are, and she has had plenty of it, one way and another."

Julia made an involuntary movement. Had not Rosamund, the very day before, been wailing into her ear complaints of the difficulty with which Lady Caroline was induced to look favorably upon any festive note of preparation, and of the tortures of anxiety to be gone through ere her opinion of any proposed merry-making was announced ?

"We have several dinner-parties for this month," proceeded the speaker, entirely unconscious, "and to all of these Rosamund accompanies us. The houses are full of shooting-parties ; and it really seems as if it rained invitations," unfolding with an easy air a note by her side.

"From Holmwood," said Lady Julia ; "and are you asked to the Waterfields also ?"

"Oh, yes," replied her sister ; "and to the rectory to meet the Bishop, and to the Bishop's to lunch after the Church festival. Indeed there seems no end to it," proceeded the speaker, who detested society, but was still fain to have it thought that she and hers were in popular request. "There is that ball, too—"

"Oh, a ball !" Julia's eye brightened. Here was

something at least for that poor child ; for, good woman as she was, it must be owned that her very soul within her had revolted before the picture of Rosamund's episcopal dissipations. Bishops were nice enough—for her and Caroline ; quite the right sort of playmates for *them*,—and, to own the truth, she would have liked very well to have taken her niece's place at the bachelor-bishop's comfortable board on the proposed occasion,—but she had not been asked, and could hardly offer. Still she did feel that a baby in long clothes would be scarcely more out of place among all the grave elders to be met at the palace, than her chatterbox of a Rosamund. But a ball—come, that was many degrees better ; and she demanded, almost with Rosamund's own eagerness, “ What ball is that, Caroline ? ”

“ I hardly know whether to go or not,” replied Lady Caroline ; “ here is the card. I have not yet said anything about it, and luckily no one was at home when it arrived. Two soldiers in full uniform brought it ; you have no idea how smart they looked.”

“ Really ! ” cried Julia, entering into the spirit of the thing.

“ Oh yes ; I could not imagine what it was I saw moving under the trees. I could not think what two soldiers could be coming up to our front door for,” continued the narrator, with the unction of one to whom the sight had been quite an event, as indeed it had—King's Common being the dullest of dull country houses, with nothing but a huge uninteresting park on the west side, and woods and dull dripping avenues on the other ; and had it not been for a private reason, with which our reader has at present nothing to do, the item of news would have been brought forward sooner. As it was, after a moment's pause, Lady Caroline returned to Rosamund.

“ She has style, my dear, and that is everything. She is not more than ordinarily pretty—at least I do not think so. Some people do, I believe ; but I own

I am glad that a daughter of mine should not look commonplace. *That* Rosamund will never do. She attracts notice at once. She can talk and laugh brightly; and I am told she can be very amusing," averred Lady Caroline, seeing nothing at all peculiar in so having to be "told"; "and what is also a good thing," she continued dispassionately, "Rosamund can look well in anything she chooses to wear. Not that *I* should ever permit a child of mine to be badly dressed," proceeded the speaker, who had never been known to allow that anything in any way pertaining to or emanating from herself was not faultless; "my children are all suitably clad." ("Although the colors of their poor frocks do set my teeth on edge," commented her auditor, with rueful recollection.) "But Rosamund is now her own mistress in that respect," continued Lady Caroline, "and—but I have no need to tell you the use she makes of her liberty. You know her of old. A frock ruined in a week—that was her way. Even now, nothing pleases her more than to smuggle on the worst and shabbiest of her old clothes, and make off out of sight whenever a carriage drives up; though I have told her constantly that she ought to be fit to be seen at all times. I had been quite annoyed about it, until—well, until after what Ford said. You remember what Ford said?" Now Lady Julia knew what Ford had said, off by heart, but it never wearied her to hear it afresh, and she was only too glad that the compliment should be engraven on Caroline's memory, as it was on her own.

"Yes. What was it exactly?" she now murmured in an encouraging accent.

"I thought I had told you. There she was flying in from the garden, with a frightful, frayed, worn-out shawl over her shoulders; and an old cap, or hat, I forget which it was, of some of her brothers, which she had torn off the stand, this make-shift thing battered down over her ears; and her hair all wild, curling and streaming in the wind, and such a color,—well

she really did look wonderfully pretty," owned Lady Caroline, nature for a moment asserting itself ; "and as for Ford, you should have heard him. 'Good heavens !' he exclaimed—under his breath, you know—'Good heavens ! What a perfect Hebe !' and he never took his eyes off her during the whole remainder of his stay. He told me afterward he was 'fairly dazzled'—those were his very words. An artist, you know : one must forgive the exaggeration."

"I can not even see it," said Julia, smiling.

"Julia—?"

"Well, Caroline?"

Lady Caroline's tone had changed, and she had drawn nearer to her sister.

"Do you—have you—I hardly know how to put it, and it is so long since we have talked on this subject, but—have you any sort of idea of what—what Hartland thinks of her?"

Julia shook her head. She had none.

CHAPTER III.

LORD HARTLAND'S WILL.

"Wealth oft sours in keeping."

—QUARLES.

WHO was Hartland? Hartland was *the* man of the place. There usually is in a country neighborhood some one person or other who overshadows and exalts it, with whom its choicest associations are connected, and whose sayings and doings are the most grateful food to its palate.

In the present instance, Lord Hartland was just such a person—the chosen representative of the affections and interests of the parish of Inkerton-on-the-wold.

He was not, however, strictly speaking, a son of the soil. That soil, indeed, his feet had never trod, his eyes had never beheld his own gray walls, and his ears had never been assailed by what should have been his native dialect, until within two years of the time at which our story commences.

It will thus be seen that it is not of the grim old progenitor of the two ladies already introduced in these pages that we at present speak.

Two years previous to the date we have now reached, the aged peer had indeed been the Lord Hartland, and the only Lord Hartland, so far as he or any one else had been aware—while the one who subsequently became so had been a mere Dick Verelst in a marching regiment, the younger son of a younger son, who, although known to be possible heir to an *English earldom* for want of a better, had been *getting no sort of good* of the prospect.

Mr. Verelst, senior, had not been a kinsman with whom the old peer had had a feeling, a taste, a virtue, or a vice in common ; and the sense of personal animosity borne him, in consequence of his being next in succession, had been such that he had never chosen to set eyes upon the young man, an only son, and indeed only child. It had seemed to him inexpressibly hard that he should have to leave all or nearly all he possessed of British soil to these interlopers, these cousins who were doubtless reckoning on every acre of it, and impatiently awaiting the time when it should be theirs ; and accordingly, to will away from them all the money he could, to rob their accession of its sweetness as much as was possible, and to line the earl's coronet with thorns, in the shape of future troubles and annoyances, had been the old gentleman's not very creditable aim when arranging his affairs, and confronting the fact, that help for it there was none—this twopenny-halfpenny Verelst, this banking fellow in Calcutta, with his oaf of a son coming after him, must at his own demise succeed to the honors of his ancient house.

To make these honors as empty as the law gave him power to do had been, as we have said, his object.

Then the banking fellow had died, and there had been a pause of consideration.

Should the younger be sent for, educated, and adopted?

"But, my dear father, he is twenty-five years old," had remonstrated Julia, timidly.

"Twenty-five years old—and what, pray, is twenty-five years old?" The fierce old man had turned upon her. "You will think little enough of twenty-five when you come to be eighty-five, I can tell you. Twenty-five is a boy. I tell you the future Lord Hartland is a boy. He knows nothing ; he has seen nothing ; he has learnt nothing. If I am to *have him here, he must be taught*. The young cub *must be licked into shape*. I won't have a plow-

boy about the place. 'Twenty-five? What's twenty-five? Damme, he shall go to Eton!'"

Clearly the old man had been failing even as he spoke. He had harked back to the idea with many a wild and strange suggestion, and had ended by sending a peremptory summons to the young Verelst to return to England forthwith. The same mail had brought the news of the writer's death.

It will thus be seen to whom it was that Lady Caroline referred at the close of the conversation narrated in the last chapter. The "Hartland" she meant was the young soldier who had met with so sudden a change in his fortunes, and who, on learning that he had come into possession of a title and estate, but without the means of maintaining either suitably, had merely designed stopping long enough in England to arrange his affairs, and then returning to India to rejoin his regiment, and pursue his profession as before.

But a counter-project had been in store for him.

"It is simply out of the question the poor dear boy's being allowed to starve." Lady Julia had trotted over to King's Common, big with a mighty purpose, as soon as the contents of their father's will had left it in no sort of doubt that he had successfully accomplished that amiable design.

"It is certainly a pity," her sister had conceded, for whose credit it would have been undoubtedly preferable that the reigning head of the house, whoever he might be, should have had a decent coat on his back. "I had no idea that my father would have done anything so foolish," she had further added, with asperity.

"Poor dear papa! I am sure that if he had only been permitted to live," the milder daughter had sighed, "he would have made another will. If he had *only lived* to see and welcome this nice young man."

Lady Caroline had smiled.

"Well, my dear, I am sure he is nice," the little

spinster had valiantly protested. "He writes as if he were" (which he had not, for his letters were the worst part of him)—"and we have at any rate no reason for supposing he is *not*. But however, Caroline," the speaker had hastened on, "that is not what I came here about to-day. Hartland must be provided for."

"I think so,—yes."

"One of your dear girls," in the lowest of whispers.

"One of my girls, Julia?"

But Lady Caroline had not been startled, nor offended, nor outraged by the suggestion. The same thing had, in fact, already occurred to herself; and with Julia—Julia, before whom she kept up no state, intrenched herself within no bulwarks—she had scarcely made even any feint of miscomprehension. She had a pretty shrewd guess of what Julia would be at, as soon as the contents of the will had been made known, and accordingly, "One of my girls, Julia?" was all that had been said, interrogatively and suggestively.

Then with many a babbling digression, and many a twist and turn, but with good sound sense at the bottom of the speaker's honest, simple-minded scheme, the whole had come out. She could not, by law, herself provide for Hartland, either by leaving him all or part of her ample fortune. It had principally come to her, as to Caroline, through their mother, and to their mother's family it must in some form return, as both knew; but all or any of her sister's children could inherit from their aunt.

"In order to be quite certain about it, I put it twice to Mr. Steward, sister, and that in the very plainest language. I inquired of him whether I were at perfect liberty to leave my fortune to any one of your dear girls, to the exclusion of the others. It seemed rather cruel to exclude the others" (parenthetically), "but then I did not name any one; and so as it may be *any* one, so it may be *any* others who would be excluded. That *being so*, I think it could hardly be called *unfair*—could it, Caroline?"

Caroline had smiled, for it had been Julia speaking.

"Well, my dear," with revived animation, "he said there was no hindrance of any kind. I might select any member of your family, son or daughter (but I did not want a son, as I told him—I said it was one of my dear nieces whom I wished to select). However, he said it was all one; I might make my choice, and as soon as I had chosen, he could have a will made out. But now, my dear Caroline, comes the difficulty. How can I make my choice, when Hartland has not yet made his choice? Oh, my dear, I beg your pardon. I am too gross; but pray forgive me—I forgot myself in my anxiety. Pray, my dear Caroline, understand that it is only your good, our good, the good of the family, I have at heart. I am carried away by it. Of course it is not for Hartland to choose—"

"And of course he may decline doing anything of the kind." Lady Caroline had not cared two straws for the outspokenness, and had only been ruminating with bent brow on the feasibility of the scheme. Her pride was not for Julia.

"We may be quite open with each other," she had declared presently. "You may say to me what you please, Julia; but you will, you must, be discreet toward him. Whatever happens, it will be absolutely necessary"—with upraised finger—"to be discreet with Hartland."

"I must say something to him, you know."

"Impossible! Not a syllable."

"But, my dear, did you not see his last letter? He only proposes stopping a few weeks, and then," tearfully, "shutting up the Abbey, sending away the servants, and going back to India."

"Turning you out of it?"

"He does not know of my existence. He would not do such a thing for the world, if he did. But I do *not* want to live there all alone," poor Julia had *dolefully* declared. "I want him to live with me."

We should get on together excellently, I know ; and it would make things smooth all round."

"But why need anything be said as to the future?"

"It is not likely"—Julia had been unusually sagacious—"that any young man would throw up his profession, to be dependent on an elderly relative, unless there were some sort of settlement."

"You are right," Lady Caroline had interrupted, brusquely. "Still it is awkward."

"For you it might be, but for me it need not at all. I put it to him as purely my own idea; I tell him that I have an arrangement—a family arrangement—in my mind, which I should like him to think over, and let me presently have his opinion of. Then I talk of you—of *our* dear girls—praise them—"

"I should leave that alone."

"You would not even tell him they are nice and pretty."

"I should let him find it out for himself. Besides, they are at present altogether too young. Rosamund is barely sixteen, and I can not have any nonsense about her. There must be no philandering after them and their governess, mind."

"But he may just see them?"

"Oh yes, he may see them,"—even Lady Caroline had laughed. "They are not exactly inclosed in a nunnery, my dear, that you should look so despairing. He may see them, and talk to them—occasionally. He will not care for it often; they have none of them anything to say—"

"Dear! I find them so delightful."

"Ah, they are fond of you," with softened tone; "you draw out what is in them, I suppose; it is not every one who can. But to return to Hartland: you should lay the matter in a purely business-like manner before him. Tell him what you can do, and what you would be disposed to do, and let him judge for himself. It is no matter of sentiment—"

"Oh, my dear Caroline!"

"In the mean time," Lady Caroline had prosaically continued, "the new Lord Hartland will be short of money. It is really disgraceful—I am extremely annoyed about it; but I understand—"

"Oh, that will be all right,"—Julia had recovered her early spirits and ardor,—"*that* I can do—I mean I can make him comfortable at once. While I live, I make Hartland a handsome allowance, and also keep up the Abbey entirely at my own expense. As long as he continues single, I preside there—as I have always done, you know—keep house for him, and receive his friends. Then when he marries Rosamund—or any one of my dear nieces—in order to enable him to do so, I step forward and settle all I have upon her, after my death. She would then simply join our party; I am easy to get on with, I really think; and I would be in no one's way. There is room for all. Oh, my dear, I do hope, I do hope it will come to pass."

"You are very good, Julia." Lady Caroline's voice had been rather low, and almost soft,—as soft as it was capable of being. "You are very good and kind," she had continued after a pause, "and the young people ought to be grateful to you. There is, of course, one person yet to be considered—"

"Your husband? Certainly."

"No; Hartland. What if his affections are already engaged?"

Then Julia's face had fallen.

"I hardly think they can be," she had murmured; "he is only twenty-five."

"Twenty-five is a most susceptible age."

"Our father talked as if he were a school-boy."

"Talking would not make him one. His having had nothing to marry upon is the more probable hindrance."

"And in his photograph he looks not in the least *like an engaged man*. There is nothing at all pre-occupied about the expression. He had such a nice,

open face, so handsome, and—and, oh, I am sure he is not a person to conceal anything."

"There would be no concealment in the matter. No one has ever asked for his confidence."

"Very true. But still—somehow, my dear, I feel that what I say is true. He is free,—I have a presentiment that he is free, and that he will marry my own dear little Rosamund."

There was no more to be said.

CHAPTER IV.

LADY JULIA FINDS A REMEDY.

"Dispatch thy purposed good : quick, courteous deeds
Cause thanks. Slow favor men unthankful breeds."

—*Tr. from AUSONIUS.*

THE acute reader will at this point instantly divine either that Hartland had *not* been free, or that he had proved to be in all respects different from what Lady Julia's fond and outrageous fancy had painted him.

Nothing of the kind.

Hartland had been destined merely to moderate, not to belie, her anticipations.

He was not a school-boy, but he was a very young man for his age. He was not handsome, but he had a plain, dark face, by no means devoid of attraction. He had not fallen headlong into her scheme for his happiness, but neither had he flatly refused to discuss it.

He had listened, and once she had caught him smiling.

He had looked at her with a pair of curious eyes, when she had become excited and demonstrative, and the look had once made her stop short and color up, when, in seeking to be practical, she had found herself growing rather too explicit.

But he had not made himself disagreeable, nor her uncomfortable, as he might have done ; he had not thrust obstacles and contingencies forward ; he had not even worn a forbidding expression ; and she had had it all out, even to the rates and taxes, without his having offered any sort of hindrance.

In truth, the idea thus presented to him had not

been without its own charm for the young man. He was, as we have said, in many respects young, almost boyish, for his age. His predilections—the things he cared most for, and was most interested in—were rather those of a lad of eighteen than of one who had early seen something of the world, and gained a measure of experience. Delighting and excelling in the great games of Old England, equally, or almost equally, good at cricket and football, his never having been at a public school was felt by him as a thing to be regretted all his life; and had such a notion been feasible, he would cheerfully, even in his twenty-sixth year, have gone to Eton, Winchester, or Harrow, as old Lord Hartland had proposed.

His delight was in the talk of big lads fresh from these time-honored haunts. He liked to hear of all that went on there, and was never weary of hearkening, never impatient of the importance attached to the rules, and oddities, and idiosyncrasies of each.

Of his own prowess in feats of running, jumping, and riding he was reasonably proud. Nature had bestowed on him a form so beautifully proportioned that he could not be ungraceful, do what he would, and in every athletic exercise, with one exception, he excelled. That exception was swimming, and, oddly enough, this simple art he had never been at the pains to acquire.

But he could hunt, and Lady Julia had spoken of hunting; he could shoot, and she had evidently expected him to shoot; he loved fields and woods, grassy meadows and green hedgerows; and it was the month of June, and all Nature had laid itself out, as it were, in seductions for him. It seemed as if, until he had actually set foot on English soil, he had never fully realized all he would have to abandon, did he return at once, as he had meant to do, to India; and yet his heart had been sore enough before.

Then, however, he had only drawn pictures from memory and hearsay—now he saw.

London had been teeming with life and revelry as he had passed through, and he had been obliged to stop a day there in order to see his lawyer, who had been out of town on his arrival. He had seen the sunlit Row at noon on a glorious morning, and had noted the brilliancy, the sparkle of the scene—the gloss on the horses' coats—the idle luxury of the loungers—the white dresses of the girls—the pretty children—and proud young fathers and mothers. He had been bewildered and confused subsequently by the uproar in the more crowded streets, and had experienced that sense of forlornness and utter loneliness common to all who have no ties nor links to hang on to in the great city ; and then he had betaken himself to Lord's, and had seen such cricket as he had never seen before in his life.

That had settled the question. If he could—could by any means, any reductions or curtailments—contrive to remain in England, live at Hartland Abbey, have a team of his own, challenge other teams, go up and down the country,—he had seen the whole thing before him, as he had mused and watched in silence.

It might not have been a very exalted castle in the air ; it had been at least a wholesome, pure and innocent one. If it had not evinced much sense of the responsibilities of a land-owner, nor of the cares and duties of an English country gentleman, recollect that of these Hartland had at that time known nothing, and not having intended to take up that position, had not supposed he was ever to know anything.

He had been, as we have said, a big boy at that period of his life, needed training, time and development, to show what he would with years become. Meanwhile it may just be added that he had, at least, had nothing to unlearn. Vice had never had any attractions.

At Lord's, for a wonder, Lord Hartland had *presently been* hailed by voices he knew. Two young men, with whom he had once been quartered, had

seen him, and had hurried across the ground to offer congratulations and make inquiries. It had appeared they knew the Abbey,—knew at least that its coverts were in good repute, and that there were two packs of hounds in the neighborhood.

They had been more than friendly—we had almost said in consequence ; but that might have been doing two respectable youths injustice. They had always liked Dick Verelst, as most people did ; and they had been only a little more glad to see him, and a little more anxious that he should dine with them at their club that evening, now that he was a jolly young fellow just come in for a title, than if he had been dear old Dick the cricketer, run over in order to see the first big match of the season. Hartland had been unable to say as much or respond as cordially as he would otherwise have done, from the awkwardness of his position ; and the frankness of former times had somehow been absent. It had been taken for granted, assumed as a matter of course, from his rejoinders, that he was going to settle down in England, and lead a merry, hearty, homely English life. This had been as it should be. His friends were of the right sort—men who, like himself, were unsnared by the follies and vices of fashionable dissipation ; and he would have liked then and there to have made them free of the Abbey, with all its congenial surroundings.

But he had been necessarily hampered by uncertainty and doubt, and had had to let the two honest fellows depart, feeling that he had been ungracious, and that they would only too probably consider that he was already putting on airs, and preparing to cold-shoulder those whom he had known and associated with in early days.

It will thus be seen that the ground had been already prepared for Lady Julia's seed.

No wonder that she had been heard with mute attention, when she had had something of such importance

to communicate ; no wonder he had remained silent till she had done.

"So I am to marry Rosamund," at length he said ; but whether to marry Rosamund or not was his intention, no mortal could have told.

"Oh, my dear Hartland, not yet. I only thought it might be as well to mention it ; but indeed you must do nothing rashly. The idea is quite, quite my own. My dear niece is barely sixteen, and in short frocks. It will be fully two years before her mother would hear of such a thing ; for my sister is very particular, and the girls are never brought forward in any way ; they are kept strictly to the school-room at present. You will see them walking with their governess, or riding on their ponies ; and you will notice what nice, bright, charming young creatures they are,—but you will not speak to them—"

"Not speak to them ?"

"Not unless it is just to say 'How d'ye do?' or so. Their mother would not like it. She has the greatest objection to their being taken notice of in any way. Between you and me, I do not quite altogether see it in the same light my sister does. It does seem a little hard that one is never able to get at the dear girls without Miss Penrose—good creature as Miss Penrose is" (Lady Julia detested her, but thought herself most uncharitable for doing so)—"it would be so nice *sometimes* to have them to one's self," she had owned ; "but it is of no use. Their uncle, George Liscard, a nice young lieutenant in the navy, got into sad hot water the last time he was at King's Common, for romping with the girls on the sly."

"Eh ?" Hartland had roused himself, and his lips had parted into an interested smile. "Did he ?"

"Rosamund is perhaps a little, just a little bit of a romp," the candid Julia had proceeded. "She will grow out of it ; and there is no harm in the dear child as she is—only high spirits. For my part, I love high spirits in the young ; and sometimes I almost wish

my dear sister could have more sympathy with them ; but, however, all I mean to say is, that I must warn you not to frolic with your cousins."

"It is rather a queer way of warning me,"—and there had been still the same lurking smile,—“telling me that I am to marry one of them."

"Oh, my dear Hartland, you are so downright. I begin to fear I ought not to have mentioned such a thing ; but really I was at a loss to know what to do, and I thought it might make your mind easy about the future, if you knew the whole plan I had in my head. There need be no reserve between us as to money matters, that is one thing decided. It is a hard case that you should have come home as head of the family, with all the attendant obligations and requirements, and so much to keep up and support, and—nothing to support it on."

Upon this Lord Hartland had bent his head. She had stated the case precisely as it stood. He had been grave enough then.

"But see, I am wealthy ; I have abundance, more than abundance, for us both," Lady Julia had cried next, rising from her chair in her anxiety to be clear and emphatic. "Independently of what my dear father left me, which should have gone to *you*,"—in parenthesis—"quite apart from that, Caroline and I each inherited a large fortune from our mother, who was an only child and the daughter of a very rich man. My father knew this, and, knowing it, I can not but say that I do not feel he acted *quite* right, not quite as I am sure he would have done had he lived longer ; but, my dear Hartland,"—for the speaker had been eager to be off such slippery, uncomfortable, and altogether dangerous ground,—“my dear Hartland, make allowances. He was, I grieve to say, blinded by prejudice. I have no doubt your father was an excellent man ; but you see, mine did not know him, and no *doubt* did him injustice. It is difficult to be just to *one's next heir*, is it not ? We need not talk about it.

My dear nephew—let me call you my nephew, if you do not mind—it will simplify matters, and people will quite understand and accept the position,—my dear Hartland, let me make what amends lie in my power; let me continue to live in your house, preside over your establishment, entertain your friends, share my fortune with you now, and bequeath it to you hereafter. And I only ask one thing,” the excellent creature had wound up in conclusion, with the tears running down her cheek; “give me a place in your heart, and let me be your ‘Aunt Julia.’”

If such a conclusion had been bathos, at least Hartland had not found it so. He had been greatly touched.

During all the long journey home, when returning from India to take up his new position and enter into his barren kingdom, bitter thoughts and angry resolutions had filled his heart. He had been almost immediately informed—informed ere he had started—that nothing but an income altogether insufficient went with the title, and that he would find himself short of funds at the very outset of his new career; and there had in consequence been merely a brief interval in which he had dreamed of being a Lord Hartland such as the Lord Hartlands who had gone before him had been.

The cup had barely been sipped ere it had been rudely dashed from his hand; and he had, as we have said, seen that there was but little for him in the future that the past had not possessed. In one way he would be even worse off, since more would undoubtedly be expected of Lord Hartland than had ever been exacted of Dick Verelst, and he would find himself in a false position at every turn in his new career.

No wonder, then, that his wrath had been kindled and had burned hot for a time, and that it had been freshly lit and had sent forth sparks and flames anew on his arrival at the Abbey. He had done his best to hold himself in check, and no outward manifesta-

tions, either of suffering or indignation, had escaped to tarnish the favorable impression one and all had received. Nothing but profound pity and universal good-will had been felt all round ; and although the keener-sighted had instinctively divined that beneath the calm exterior all was not so smooth as had appeared, they had liked Hartland not the less, but rather the more, in that he had shown he could smart but would not show his wound.

The blood had more than once flashed to his face, and his eye had striven to betray him now and again, it is true, when irresistibly impelled to it by some new and sudden circumstance or suggestion ; but in the main his demeanor had been proudly impassive, and Lady Julia, in her distress and impatience, had scarcely known how to bear the delay which had had to elapse ere she had been able to get him to herself and unburden her bosom of its load.

She had done it at last, and had heard him breathe quicker and quicker, as the scheme had been unfolded. The hand by his side had opened and closed involuntarily with hasty, nervous movements. He had stood the whole time, sometimes in one attitude, sometimes in another, always with the air of a man who hardly knows where he is or what he is doing. She had seen he was lost in a confusion of strange and new emotions. And such indeed had been the case.

Here had he, in his own mind, been at bitter enmity with all his newly-found kindred ; especially railing secretly at those two greedy, covetous women, who were now to fatten at his expense, and who would doubtless assume toward him patronizing, hypocritical airs of sympathy ; while in reality it was they who were driving him forth from the home of his ancestors, and standing between him and his just inheritance.

What though he had only been a poor second cousin or so ? Two generations back his branch had sprouted straight and true from this lordly stem ; and those *great lords and ladies*, those ruffled dames and knights

in armor, had belonged to him, and bequeathed to him their noble blood as truly as if he had been the late peer's first-born son, born and bred within those walls.

He had been, and he was being, most cruelly wronged ; and though he had told himself that his lips should be sealed by decency and that reserve which was the only safeguard of his self-respect under an ordeal so odious, yet he had in secret wished good Julia anywhere but where she was, and almost anything but what she was.

For he had seen—as who could help seeing?—that she was artless, and it had not been easy to accuse her. Probably she was a simpleton, and did not know what she was doing. In that case he would try to be charitable ; and if let alone, and not compassionated nor provoked, would put her out of his thoughts. She might live on at the Abbey if she chose. He supposed she would pay him rent, and the rent would be swallowed up in the yearly outlay. He would let her and the steward manage between them, and get to loggerheads about it if they chose. He would cut the whole concern.

One sight of Hartland Abbey, with its lodges, its avenues, its deer-park, shrubberies, gardens, stables, out-buildings, terraces, and doorways, with its halls, staircases, galleries, and suites of rooms, had dispelled all hopes of accomplishing the design formed of living there on a modest and retrenching scale. No,—the impossibility of this had been obvious at a glance ; and ere he had crossed the threshold, he had seen his future anew melt into thin air. Then had come the meeting with Lady Julia, and renewal of all hostile feelings ; and then, just when these had been at their height, and some little sign had escaped, some bubble had rippled to the surface, telling for a second of the convulsion underneath, and giving the poor spinster, who had been on the tiptoe of excitement and impatience, the opening she wanted, out it had all come ;

and it had been shown that the two whom he had regarded as the most unjust and avaricious of their kind, had had nothing but the warmest of feelings toward him, and had been occupied by projects for his benefit, surpassing anything of which he could ever have dreamed. Shame had tied his tongue forthwith.

How he had wronged this good creature—both these good creatures—for in every sentiment and expression, Lady Julia had naturally associated with herself her sister, and it had been “Caroline and I” throughout; how he had misjudged and misinterpreted them!

The flood of new light let in upon his thoughts had been well-nigh overpowering. Impossibility had become possible; what he had told himself could never be, had actually come to pass. Hartland Abbey was to be his own on the easiest and pleasantest terms; it had been almost incredible, almost too much. It had been a positive relief to talk about the unknown Rosamund, and by trifling a moment with her name, and that dim, far-away suggestion regarding it, gain a foothold whereupon to steady himself. He had even been the better for having interchanged smiles with his friendly monitor, and having been told he was not to romp with his cousins.

But still his head had gone whirling round; and all she, this ministering angel, had asked of him in return, had been that he should call her his “Aunt Julia”!

He had taken her hand. He might have kissed it, but he had not thought of doing so. He had only taken it and held it for a moment, while his voice, in spite of every effort, had trembled a little, and all he had said was, “Thank you, Aunt Julia”; but she had been certain—yes, quite certain—that he had stopped thus short because he had been unable to bring out another word.

And she had been right,

CHAPTER V.

NO ADVANCE MADE.

"For what is love? It is a doll dressed up
For idleness to cosset, nurse, and dandle;
A thing of soft misnomers."

—KEATS.

SO far from being upset by this new change in his fortunes, Hartland had thereafter hardly known how to demean himself humbly enough in the sudden revulsion of his feelings.

He had on the spot, as was natural, surrendered every spark of lingering animosity toward the generous woman who had stepped forward to redress all his wrongs with her own hand; nay, he had gone further; in his inmost soul he had cast himself at her feet and implored forgiveness.

She had bound him to her then and there in a life-long bond of gratitude and affection, and he could not show sufficiently his readiness to do and be all she could wish thenceforth.

In response to her nobility he had longed to evince his own. He could not hope to win, but he would at least compete with her in the race who should be the most considerate and the most unselfish in the life now begun; and such desires on his part had for a considerable length of time shown themselves in his scarcely liking to give an order, change a custom, or play the master of the house in any way. Then Lady Julia had protested. "My dear boy, you are really too good, too kind; you make too much of the old aunt," she had cried. "I can not have you putting me first in everything, and never thinking of yourself at all."

"You think you ought to have the monopoly for that, Aunt Julia?"

She had not understood, and he had not explained. The idea had dropped out by accident.

"But really you are too accommodating," she had persisted. "Why, because *I* have been accustomed to old-fashioned ways, need you be condemned to them? You can not like to dine at six o'clock; then why do it? For myself, really I should prefer—yes, indeed, quite prefer—keeping up with the fashions of the day; and I am not so very old yet, you know," smiling. "I love young folks, and suiting myself to them. My poor dear father kept to his early dinner-hour because it was the one at which he had dined in his youth, and he disliked changes of every kind. But that need not bind us. Fix your own hours, I must really beg of you, Hartland." And she had felt genuinely elated, and almost rakish, when he had owned with reluctance that the hour at which he had usually sat down to mess had been half-past seven: he had not added that, by some, even that hour was growing to be considered out of date.

That decided, another point had arisen. "The stables, my dear Hartland,—I am convinced you know more about horses than I do."

"Yes, Aunt Julia," gravely.

"Why do you not re-arrange them, then, my dear?" (His very finger-tips had been itching to do so.)

"Do you think they want re-arranging, ma'am? I thought perhaps Hubbard might not care for interference."

"Interference from you? From his master?"

"Oh, if you put it in that light, Aunt Julia," joyfully; "but are you sure you mean what you say? Have I your authority for doing what I think fit, and—and—?"

"My dear nephew,"—she had been almost pettish—"will you *never* understand? I have no authority, I will have none any longer, about such mat-

ters as ought to fall under a master's eye. You will see that I am comfortable, and that things go on properly, I know. But *you* are the head of this establishment, to *you* the servants must look for orders, on *you* their staying or going depends ; and it is not *you* who must come to *me* for authority, but *I* who will go to *you*, if there is any matter of importance or difficulty to be adjusted. Pray, pray, my dear Hartland, let us have no misunderstanding on this point, either now or in the future."

And she had again struck the right chord in his heart, and he had loved her still more than he had done before.

Of course it had been a risk, but even Lady Caroline had never for a moment cast a doubt upon the success of Julia's handiwork.

Had she been unbiased, perhaps matters had not been so smooth ; but with the knowledge of all that Julia had plotted and planned, and the understanding that it had at least not been set aside by the person most chiefly concerned, she would have been a fool indeed if she had found anything to grumble at.

To her Hartland had been only one degree less grateful than to her sister.

Lady Julia's protestations had, as we have seen, included her married sister, the only other representative of the family, at every turn ; and these had seemed to show that both were of one mind in the warmth of their repudiation of the family ill-feeling toward him. He had been kindly met at King's Common,—what Lady Caroline would have called affectionately met, indeed ; and although he had been somewhat startled by the difference between the sisters in aspect, manner, voice, and shake of the hand, he had still persisted in liking where he could not love, and had almost made Lady Caroline endurable by the force of his resolution to find her so.

What he had thought of his cousins, both aunts had often endeavored to discover.

Once it would be on Julia's part. "We are never dull, are we, Hartland, with such a houseful close by? What should we do without all those King's Commoners, as I call them? We should not be half so merry." There had just been a tea-party at the Abbey, and the whole crew, and even Miss Penrose, had been in famous spirits, and had tumbled up and down, and in and out, all over the place, and had finally disappeared amidst shouting, and laughing, and waving of handkerchiefs. "I was glad you should have a chance of talking to the girls for once," the astute matchmaker had continued. "Miss Penrose has such a way of placing herself in front of them, and answering for everybody all round, that really, unless she is disposed of, one has no hope of hearing another voice."

"That was why you carried her off?"

"Certainly," said Lady Julia, laughing. "I am not so particularly partial to Miss Penrose's company, that I should have run away from you all to closet myself with her otherwise; and I must own it was tantalizing to hear Rosamund's merry laugh ring out just as we were leaving the room; but I knew you would all enjoy yourselves the better if there were no old fogies about. Old fogies are apt to be marplots."

"You do not call yourself an old fogy?"

"Indeed I do. What am I then?"—(for the pleasure of hearing him disclaim).

"About as much of one as you are of a marplot."

"Really such compliments!" cried the good soul, who had never been so happy in her life. "What a courtier you are, Hartland! I do not wonder at my sister Caroline. You have made a conquest even of her. As for Rosamund"—she paused, hoping he would look or say something unusual—something to give her the ghost of a clue to his sentiments in that quarter.

But that was just what Hartland was not going to

do. On every other point he could be, and had been, frankly communicative, and it came naturally to him to say the little, kind, civil things, and to give the little pieces of information as to what had happened during the day, and to bestow the "good-night" kiss of a young relation, which Lady Julia had instituted, and which seemed to establish the footing upon which the two were : all of these trifling pleasantries drew them closer to each other, and made the harmony between them more complete ; but no advance had been made with regard to the matrimonial part of the plan, and two years had passed when our story opens, and the two elder ladies were exactly where they had been when it had first been broached, as regarded their knowledge of Lord Hartland's feelings or wishes on the subject.

Our readers, however, may be permitted a gleam of information.

Hartland, during the two past years, although he had not troubled himself very seriously with the consideration, had recollected and occasionally meditated upon the opportunity presented him for ultimately securing the fortune, of which he had now only the interest, and that during Lady Julia's lifetime. He had also kept his eyes open.

Here were seven young damsels, daughters of one house, any one of whom he was at liberty to sue, and with any one of whom would come, slap-bang, the all-important dowry. Out of a choice of seven, surely one might be found with whom he could fancy himself a little bit in love, and who would be able to get up a little bit of response.

No one of them was amiss to look at. They were all bound to be well-educated, well-mannered, and well-principled. He need not be afraid of lurking quicksands in that guarded and sheltered household. He must find out an easy-going one, who was not likely to say "No"; and when that was done, he would have broken the back of the venture, and the

rest would follow of itself. As to being in love, he had had enough of that. Half a-dozen years before, when yet in his teens, he had been violently, blindly, and, as a matter of course, effervescently infatuated with a charmer many years his senior. The colonel of his regiment had warned his father, and the affair had been stopped with a high hand ; but the ungrateful subaltern had not seen it in the light he should have done.

Instead of blessing, morning, noon, and night, the two who had saved him from a life-long regret—for the woman was worthless and heartless—he had closed his eyes and ears ; and whenever he had subsequently thought about marriage in the abstract (for no successor had ever, strange to say, taken her place in his affections), it had been to consider, with a certain sentimental luxury of supposed woe, that he had once loved, and that with him there would never come a second time.

Accordingly, Lady Julia had found the ground fallow, as we have said ; and the only little cloud which by-and-by arose on the horizon of her heaven of blue, was the suspicion that, although time was passing, fallow the ground still remained as regarded any attachment being formed.

It is true that of the cousins Rosamund was, if anything, Hartland's favorite, and this in spite of her being exactly the opposite of the one for whom, in reviewing his position at the outset, he had considered he should look out.

No one, by the wildest stretch of the imagination, could call the eldest Miss Liscard easy-going. Her likings and dislikings, her affinities and aversions, were magnified by a nature vehement and impetuous into matters of life and death, when opposed or disagreed with. She could not let a thing pass, could not restrain her tongue even when a hundred warnings betokened the wisdom of silence. She did not, it is to be feared, even esteem strict justice as much as

she herself supposed, if only she could have her fling at the backbiter or the tell-tale.

All this Hartland knew,—knew, perhaps, better than any one else ; and yet he liked Rosamund better than Dolly, and better a thousand times than Catherine.

And first, indeed, he had thought the little, round-faced, chubby Dorothea, four years younger than Rosamund, and with a brother between her and Catherine, would have suited him admirably ; and her youth had been all in her favor. Four years more before he need trouble his head about the matter was by no means to be despised ; and Dolly was a most engaging poppet of the Aunt Julia type, which aunt she was supposed to resemble in disposition as well as in appearance. He had passed over Catherine at once : her blue eyes, and orderly, flaxen ringlets, and nice, obliging manners, had had no charm for him (perhaps owing to an occasional and enlightening look of scorn on Rosamund's face) : and he had faithfully attached himself to Dolly, in a fraternal fashion, for some time.

But, in spite of himself, Rosamund interested him ; she had crept into his thoughts when he was alone ; he had found himself recalling a gesture or a glance after he had parted from her, and assuming a certain tone toward her when the two were alone, which had dropped off of its own accord upon the approach of others. This had just begun at the time our story opens, when, as we have said, the young lady had attained her eighteenth year (two years, it will be remembered, subsequent to the period of Hartland's arrival at the Abbey) ; and Hartland had himself wakened up with a start to the fact that the time for action, if action were to be taken at all, had come. It had also dawned upon him to wonder whether or no Rosamund had her own suspicions. That she had been informed, or even hinted to, was not to be *thought of* for an instant. He knew his aunts better

than to suppose them capable of indelicacy ; but had she divined by instinct anything ?

Of course Rosamund had.

At first the discovery had filled her with unreasoning girlish rage, and her bosom had swelled with a sense of passionate rebellion to what, with all the grandiloquism of youth, she had internally stigmatized as an act of tyranny.

But Hartland's indifference and taste for the society of her little sister had given the elder time to think ; and as her vision had cleared, she had thought she saw the whole thing. He no more meant to fall in love with her than she did with him ; and she might spare her gibes, and sarcasms, and contemptuous looks, for he did not know what they meant.

Thus she had dropped them, and then Hartland had begun to take notice of her.

But by this time Rosamund, disarmed, had corrected her first impression, and had even begun to associate her cousin with herself in her sense of ill-usage. How absurd the whole idea was ! Hartland must be as much provoked as she if he saw it. She hoped to goodness he did not see it ; she should never be able to look him in the face if she once found that he had an inkling of what was going on.

" And Hartland is well enough if he is let alone," she owned to herself ; " but what I can not stand is the fuss made about him and the way Aunt Julia and mamma sit down and cackle over him ; and when he comes into a room, the business there is to get near him ; and the attention they pay to every word he speaks, and quote his opinions afterward—it is enough to turn one against the man, and make one hate him on the spot, that's what it is, if mamma did but know it. And then it is always 'your cousin Hartland' here, and 'your cousin Hartland' there ; and I must do this because my 'cousin' wishes it, or not do it if he does not wish it. My 'cousin' forsooth ! My third or thirtieth cousin ;—and I know,

of course I know, what is the meaning of it all. As if we are going to marry each other just because mamma and Aunt Julia have agreed upon it ! I could laugh to see them putting their heads together, and taking it for granted that we are going to be good little children, and do as we are bid. Put handy-pandy in handy-pandy, and trot away off to the Abbey, and live happily there ever after !

“And they look so pleased and important if we do but say a few words to each other now and then ; and mamma makes way for him to pass on to me, and tries to get up some flimsy excuse which would not take in a harvest-mouse ; and I always find his place next mine at dinner, when he dines with us ; and I may do what I like, and laugh, and talk, and run on as much as ever I choose, when he is by—every one is so benign, and in such good-humor. Oh ! I know, I know. It is very good fun as long as nobody else suspects, and I mean to enjoy it all I can—up to a certain point, my lord, up to a certain point. Thus far shalt thou go, Hartland, and no further. As you are, I like you ; further than that I like you not. No advance, if you please ! We shall remain excellent friends just so long as we keep our present positions, but one false step will send us as wide apart as the poles. Oh, my good mother and aunt, look out, look out !—we shall cheat you both yet.”

CHAPTER VI.

ROSAMUND AS A CONTRAST.

" Art she had none, yet wanted none,
For Nature did that want supply ;
So rich in treasures of her own,
She might our boasted stores defy."

—DRYDEN.

WE have now a bird's-eye view of the general position of our *dramatis personæ*.

Lord Hartland is to marry Rosamund, Aunt Julia is to dower the bride, the two are to live at Hartland Abbey, and Lady Caroline is thus to be free to bring out her next daughter.

All this is very nicely arranged, and it only remains for the wheels to turn, and the machinery to be set in motion.

As we have seen, however, one spoke was already there, and there were indications of another, which did not escape the two pairs of eyes on the watch.

Lord Hartland showed no disposition to encroach beyond the barrier-line drawn by his fair cousin in the last chapter : it might even have seemed to an ill-natured spectator that he was, if anything, still less disposed to quit his present foothold than the young lady was to have him do so. If he were a single degree more friendly with her than usual one day, he swung back like a pendulum till he was a full pace behind what he had been the next ; if a momentary notice had been taken of Rosamund, perhaps unavoidably evoked by circumstances, she was sure to be *annoyingly swamped* in a general survey or observation immediately thereafter ; and if he had been

caught bestowing so much as a glance of admiration, he turned away his eyes as if from beholding vanity.

The poor man was frightened—that was the truth.

He had no particular turn for matrimony ; and the remembrance of an unhappy childhood, rendered so by ill-mated parents, together with some more recent experiences of a like nature, had made him shy of taking the plunge on his own account. Not being in love, he preferred to defer the evil day.

Things were very pleasant as they were, he thought : he had all he wished, and far more than he had ever hoped for, in his new life ; the Abbey was a home that might have satisfied any man ; Lady Julia was the kindest, cheerfulest, pleasantest of old maids to live with that could have been imagined ; his shooting parties were the merriest, and his cricket-team the strongest, in the county ; he got on well with his people, his farmers, tenants, and laborers ; he had not the ill-word of anyone, high or low, so far as he knew ; he lived at peace with his neighbors ; and his parson was his most particular friend. Could any change be for the better ?

As for Rosamund, he liked Rosamund—well enough. It was not *her* but *it*—the whole thing—he shirked and dreaded. If he had been let alone—if there had been no delighted looks, and fond inquiries, and thinly veiled anxiety at the Abbey, no stately unbending and grim approval at King's Common—he would have got on excellently with the unmanageable, inflammable, wild young thing who was metaphorically kicking up her heels all over in the place, in the joy of her new-born freedom. Hartland, who was of a sober sort, had a lurking sympathy with such choice spirits, and the two would have been fast friends, if no more, he told himself, if this foolish idea of a marriage had never been started,—but as it was, the idea was like *an iron hand* holding him back from any sort of easy companionship.

Of this he himself was aware, but he was ignorant

that he might have gone a very great deal further in the same direction, and still not have outshot the truth.

The truth, then—the real, the actual truth,—and let anxious guardians and match-makers read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it—was this, that had it been possible for every sort of recollection of Lady Julia's project to have been blotted out of Hartland's memory; had he of himself and by himself found out the beauties and the blemishes and all the secret springs of that bewitching and bewildering effervescence which now, as it were, danced before his eyes in a Rosamund unapproachable and unattainable; had they met alone, unnoticed and unheeded, and each unprepared for the other,—his heart had been hers long, long before he knew.

As it was, the very fact that he was being watched and approved of and presided over, had the natural effect; and it said something for both Hartland and Rosamund that all this did not render each odious in the other's eyes.

"But we really must come to some sort of an understanding before long."

Lady Caroline was alone with her sister, of course, when such a remark could be made. "It was all very well as long as the girls were in the school-room, Julia; but now that Rosamund has been out for three months and been seen everywhere, there is nothing to wait for. If there is to be anything between her and Hartland, it must be now, or never."

"My dear Caroline, I really—you see there is no particular hurry."

"Now that is you, Julia, all the world over. No hurry! And Catherine only a year younger, and Dolly close behind her. To talk of there being no hurry, by which I presume you mean that the affair may hang on and on indefinitely, is absurd. Either it *must be now, or not at all.*"

Lady Julia was silent.

"Does Hartland mean anything, or does he not?"

"My dear—" Lady Julia paused.

"It was not my idea, but yours," pursued Lady Caroline, who was in a humor to browbeat any one that day; "you originated the whole; you broached it to Hartland; you undertook it in your plan for his living with you; and you assured me that he was inclined to agree. If Hartland draws back now—"

"He has never said a word about drawing back," replied Lady Julia, with more spirit than could have been expected; "and I must own that I think you are over-hasty altogether. Give Hartland time."

"Oh, time? I wish you could understand," cried Lady Caroline impatiently, and had Julia known, there was more reason for her impatience than appeared. "I can not make you see with my eyes,—I never could," proceeded the speaker, stating a fact for which the Abbey folks had daily cause to bless their good luck; "but, however, it is of no use talking," she added, and indeed she had been on the brink of an indiscretion. "I have my own reasons,—ahem—why, you yourself, Julia, have often pitied poor Beatrice Waterfield, who introduces a new daughter year by year, till she has now a perfect train behind her wherever she goes. Upon my word," exclaimed Lady Caroline, with an energy that yet showed a returning self-satisfaction and good-humor—"upon my word, I never think of Beatrice and her seven daughters behind her, without a shudder."

"Seven, dear? Only six, I think," corrected Julia, gently.

"Seven," pronounced her sister, in a voice that might have spoken their doom. "You forget the school-girl, Diana—"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, I thought you spoke of the girls who were out—"

"And in another year Diana will also be out. And there she will be to be taken about also, and to be presented, and everything!"

"Oh, we will hope for the best," said Lady Julia pleasantly ; "and I know, for my part, I can not but admire the unselfishness and sweet temper with which Beatrice makes the best of those poor, unattractive girls—dear me ! I hope I am not uncharitable—I did not mean 'unattractive' ; I dare say they are quite attractive to some people—quiet, gentle, *good* girls ; but somehow, when one looks at them beside Rosamund !—"

"Yes, beside Rosamund," assented Lady Caroline, now entirely restored to complacency by so timely a suggestion—"beside Rosamund they lose all the color they possess. I am not a blindly partial parent, as you know, Julia ; but I can not help seeing—no one can help seeing—that when she is present, all animation as she usually is, those others seem absolute dullness itself. And, moreover, it is not only the Waterfield girls, it is every one. Now, is it not ?"

"Certainly"—Lady Julia was to the full as amiably prejudiced—"certainly ; you are right in that," she said. "Still, one does see very ordinary girls very well married."

"Not where there are six of them," cried Lady Caroline, almost eagerly ; "at least, not when all six are everywhere present. What is the use of Beatrice's going up to town season after season, taking an expensive house in an expensive part, giving balls and parties, and toiling and straining to get her daughters asked to the best houses in return ? When the men come to see them, what do they find ? Not one but six Miss Waterfields, all pleasing, and agreeable, and well mannered, and well dressed, and ready to talk, and to smile, and to play on the piano—good heavens ! the piano is never silent in that drawing-room—and what is the consequence ? No man wants to marry six girls ; and as for singling out any one from the rest, and expecting to find any single thing in her that he did not find in all the others, he might as well try to fix his affections upon a blade of grass—"

out of a meadow. I do not say they are not amiable girls, and well-bred—"

—"Sweet, gentle," murmured Lady Julia.

"Unattractive," Julia."

"Did I say 'unattractive'? But I only said they were so to *me*. To other people—"

"Oh, nonsense, my dear! If *you* can not find attractions in them, no one can," said Lady Caroline, with a shade of contempt in her more kindly tone. "No, no; there is no need to be so nice between ourselves. We can see plainly enough how the land lies. But still, as I was about to say, when you interrupted me, something might be done if Beatrice would only realize the fact that these girls, by crowding so together, stand in each other's light. If they could be sent out by twos and twos—for it would be too much to suppose that they should do anything singly,—but if they could be broken up into small detachments, they would at least obtain some sort of individual notice. They would not be handicapped by the shadows of the others in the background. If any one did happen to take a fancy to, say, Eleanor, he would not observe precisely the same qualities in Violet, Amy—and indeed running through all the seven. He might—mind, I do not say he would—but he might imagine that a dull, stupid, excellent sort of girl, such as one of the Waterfields, would make a better wife than a prettier or cleverer one."

"Are you not a little severe, Caroline?" It was the nearest approach to a remonstrance Lady Julia ever made.

"Severe? Not at all"; Lady Caroline promptly quashed the idea. "I have not a word to say against the Waterfields," she continued. "They are almost the only acquaintance we have, with whom we can comfortably associate. We have known them all our lives; and, all things considered, I should be sorry to lose them out of the neighborhood. Beatrice is invariably friendly, and anxious we should go there,

and that the young people should meet ; and I have made no sort of objection to Rosamund's being frequently at the Grange, now that she has less to do at home. She is there at this moment—"

But she was nothing of the kind ; she entered even as the last words were spoken, and with her the young ladies who had also been the theme of the above discourse.

"Mamma, I have brought over some hungry people for luncheon," said Rosamund, making her way to embrace her aunt, while Lady Caroline advanced with her usual air of formal civility to greet the newcomers. "I found them, and I brought them, and they are going to stop the afternoon if you press them very hard," she added merrily ; "and Aunt Julia will just please to do the same, and Hartland is here too,"—and with the name of Hartland the boldness of the proposal was explained.

"How do you do, Eleanour—Amy—Violet?" said Lady Caroline, kissing steadily through the trio. "Rosamund was fortunate in finding you at home, and able to come over this beautiful day. We must make the most of all the summer that remains."

"Yes. It is wonderfully hot for September," observed Miss Waterfield, seating herself. "Are we not interrupting you, Lady Caroline?"

"Not at all, my dear ; my morning's work is over."

("My bringing Hartland provided for that, my lady mother," quoth Miss Rosamund to her saucy self. "'Waterfields, minus Hartland, to the right about, and whistle for your luncheon,' would have been the order of the day if I had not made arrangements, my dears ; so you need not look so open-eyed at her ladyship's affability.")

"And so you can stop a little and keep Rosamund company," proceeded the hostess. "She is rather left to herself nowadays, not being one of a nice merry party like you, all so nearly of an age. You can hardly know what it is to be dull. You are quite

independent of other society. You must have so many resources among yourselves."

All the time she was looking at them, and Lady Julia knew what was in her heart.

There the three sat, so quiet, so composed, so motionless, so absolutely irreproachable in dress and faultless in demeanor, so exactly all that they ought to be in voice, air, and attitude, yet so hopelessly on a level, so fatally equal in every excellence, that a row of clipped poplars could not have been more uniform.

In the midst stood Rosamund, her face half hidden behind the large hat with which she fanned her glowing cheeks, her brilliant eyes roving round the group alight with mischief, a laugh hidden about the corners of her mouth. "And her hair all abroad as usual," internally commented Lady Caroline,—but she looked at Julia in triumph.

If Hartland would only come in now! Come in in and see this radiant young creature, and contrast her with those correct girls, sitting so properly still and ladylike in their chairs,—surely some sentiment, some emotion, must for very shame be kindled in his breast. He could not be so insensate as not to feel, so dull as not to see, the difference. She tapped the floor with her foot, impatiently. Where was he? What was he doing? What hindered him from entering? Somehow, with Julia sitting by, she did not wish to inquire, preferred not to seem too curious,—but to be tongue-tied was a rare experience with her, and she hardly knew how to put up with it.

Had Hartland come over of himself? Had Rosamund been to the Abbey to fetch her aunt, and, finding her absent, fetched her cousin instead? Or, had he been merely met with by the way?

Simple things enough to learn; but, following as this did hard upon the sisters' conference, the inquiries stuck in the interrogator's throat.

She looked at her daughter; but Rosamund, securely audacious as was her wont when Hartland

was near, was, shocking to relate, swinging on one leg with an unflinching eye direct upon herself—an eye, moreover, which plainly said, “Find out if you can. But there is nothing to be learned from *me*.”

Now that very morning Rosamund had had a long walk alone with Hartland, and although not a word had passed between them which all the world might not have heard, each had been fully aware of all that would have been prophesied and hoped for, had the incident come to light; and it had been quite understood between them, though the understanding had been a tacit one, that neither was, in school-boy phrase, to peach.

They had come across each other by accident on her first going out, and, nobody being by to interfere, instead of a mere interchange of morning greetings, the two had readily joined company, and he had turned back to make his way hers. He had had his morning on his hands, not intending to shoot that day; and she had started for the Waterfields', to whose house she was allowed to walk without an escort, the way lying entirely through the Abbey grounds and their own. She had only to cross the high-road, from one little white gate to another.

Although no escort was needed, Hartland had nevertheless proffered his company; and the September sky being bright overhead, while the dewy air had that keen, exhilarating nip dear to the young and healthy, the two had stepped gayly forward, and—not without a sense of the humor of it—had extended and amplified their walk, until it had grown to quite respectable dimensions. With no one else would Miss Liscard have dared for a moment to rove so far and remain so long; and as the little minx knew this perfectly, and as Hartland had more than a suspicion of the same, each had been vastly amused in their inward souls, reflecting on the capital that would have been made of the escapade by the sagacious elders, had it by any chance come to their ears.

It had been very good fun to both ; and in their secret and their unspoken sympathy over it, the accomplices had been nearer to love-making than they had ever been before ; but in the fact that no love-making had been made, while appearances had been all the other way, lay the very kernel of the jest.

A spark of seriousness would have spoiled all.

It was this which lent to Rosamund's brow the archness which puzzled Lady Caroline.

The mischief-loving creature was laughing in her sleeve to think what a dance after Will-o'-the-wisp the poor lady would have been led, had a hint been dropped of what had been going on. Dearly would Rosamund have liked that hint to bestow. Delicious it would have been to have slipped out casually some such passing remark as "How fast those young pheasants of Hartland's grow ! We went round to take a peep at them before going to the Grange—" or, "Hartland will have his hands full if he cuts down all the trees he is marking. We marked an immense number in the hour and a half we were at it just now,—" and to have watched the effect produced.

The effect of such an observation properly handled would have been fine indeed. It would have caused Lady Caroline hastily to introduce another topic, and to say the most agreeable things in the blandest tones in order to conceal her pleasure ; while the less sophisticated Julia would have started in her chair, and openly looked significance, the while considering she was doing all that discretion could possibly demand, if she did not with clasped hands ejaculate "Thank Heaven !" upon the spot.

And, after all, what had the predestined lovers done ?

Tramped cheerily along, talking, laughing, telling each other stories, and every now and then breaking out into snatches of song, which had startled the wood-pigeons and the rabbits.

They had taken to the woods, and had rustled through the red paths among the dropping beech-leaves, climbed mossy knolls wet beneath and dripping overhead, slipped down muddy banks, and skirted deeply rutted cart-tracks. Often they had had to walk one behind the other, between sopping grass-fields, and Hartland had gone first, that the smaller feet which followed might find *terra firma* in foot-prints : but he had only offered his hand when help was really necessary, and even when she had had to jump some ditches, and had cleared them bravely, he had seen her go over with as much philosophy as if she had been his sister.

They had been silent when they had not cared to speak, without the silence having had any kind of oppression about it ; and the occasional services he had rendered had been paid without gallantry, and accepted without coquetry. All had been free, comfortable unrestraint.

Once he had had to disentangle from her skirts a trailing branch of bramble.

The branch had clung obstinately, sticking fast to a new place as soon as loosened from the old, and he had bidden her stand still, and had put down his stick, and had anathematized the pertinacious "follower" so heartily, that even she had felt a momentary confusion, knowing what she knew. She had wondered at his unconcern, but the next instant their eyes had met and flashed revelations, and she had seen him turn aside his head to laugh, while she had turned hers to blush. Not a syllable had been spoken.

It had been the only awkward moment,—and yet it had been the gem of the walk.

"Confound this 'follower,' I can't get him off!" had been Hartland's very natural exclamation, as he had torn and twisted, afraid of doing damage to the thin summer fabric his cousin was still wearing. "He sticks to you like a leech ; but stand still for a mo-

ment, Rosamund, and I'll be even with him yet—" and then he had held up the luckless "follower" as the huntsman holds the brush, in triumph, and the next moment they had both laughed in each other's faces.

Many and many a time in years to come that little scene was to rise before Rosamund's eyes, yet half a day afterwards she thought she had forgotten it.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO TONGUES LET LOOSE.

"Give not thy tongue too great liberty, lest it take thee a prisoner. A word unspoken is like the sword in the scabbard, thine ; if vented, thy sword is in another's hand."—QUARLES.

ALL of this, however, and the very fact of the walk itself, it was felt to be so expedient to keep in the dark, that, on nearing the Waterfields', Hartland had made his dog the excuse for going no farther, and had engaged to meet the return party at a certain landmark.

He was to be depended on for silence as regarded an earlier meeting ; and the intimacy between the families was known to be such, that, on the approach of the four young ladies, his "So you have succeeded in your errand, Rosamund?" showing that he had known what that errand had been, had excited no surprise, since it had been felt that she might at any time have told him she was hoping to take home with her some of her friends from the Grange, to spend the afternoon.

As it appeared that his presence also was desired at King's Common, he had joined the party, and favored as she thus was by Fortune on all sides, surely nothing more was needed to have brought back sunshine into the fair face of the youthful diplomatist ? Nevertheless, there was another and a tenderer cause ; some one who is very soon to appear in these pages, was half expected by two people in that stately drawing-room within the hour, and the expectation lay at the root of half the joyous spirits of the one, and the querulous impatience and only partially allayed ill-humor of the

other. Lady Caroline had not allowed herself to confide even to Julia all that was in her mind that day; she had not dared to say why it was so imperative that Hartland should promptly begin his wooing; and only Hartland's actual presence—or vicinity, for he had gone round to the kennels to fasten up his dog—had calmed her ruffled brow, as she saw the Miss Waterfields walk in.

In an instant she had divined that they were there because another guest, and an unwelcome one, was on the horizon.

Then Rosamund had pronounced her magic word, and hope had revived; it might have been for Hartland—why should it not have been for Hartland?—that the party had been collected.

Hartland was come, actually come,—and no one had even hinted that any one else was coming. She would put away the idea, and make the Waterfield girls understand that she was glad to see them, and bid Julia take off her shawl, and send word to the servants to lay extra places for luncheon.

All was done with the best of good breeding, and the company generally understood that they were to be tolerated.

Accordingly, Eleanour Waterfield, who was a shade less in awe of Lady Caroline than her sisters, ventured to lead the conversation, which was apt to lag in that august presence. "I think everybody was out and about to-day," she observed: "we met, first, the rector and Mrs. Allen, then Mary Allen and Rose Crossley, then a great cart-load of Johnson-Wigrams, and last of all Mr. Bartlett's groom. I am not sure whether the meeting the groom was not the most exciting encounter of any, for he had a very unmanageable horse, and backed up a side-lane, and then came galloping past so frantically that we thought the horse had bolted, and all fled up the bank,—I assure you it was quite an adventure, Lady Caroline."

"Runaway horses are extremely dangerous," re-

plied Lady Caroline—but she was not so sententious as she could have wished. She could hardly even listen to Eleanour's prattle at that moment.

This, however, was not for Miss Waterfield to take note of, and she continued pleasantly: "It is not often that we are so lively. We quite congratulated ourselves on having taken to the road, instead of coming through the woods. The woods would have been too wet, Rosamund said; and really it is not very much longer coming round by the road. How long did it take you to walk over to us, Rosamund?"

Unlucky question! It had not occurred to Rosamund that there might be an investigation into times and seasons, and the smile died out of her face. Still she kept a bold front. "I have no idea," she said, and prudently neither extended nor qualified her statement.

Lady Caroline Liscard was, however, the last person to have taken note that her daughter had been absent since breakfast-time, and had not returned till nearly one, having in the interim accomplished a walk of three miles, all told.

Rosamund had started early, in order, if the truth were told, to be out of her mother's way: she had not cared about an early return; and that being so, Hartland's proposition of a longer ramble, and even the still longer one into which it had thereafter grown, had been all to the good. It had enabled her to pass agreeably a considerable portion of time that had lain with a somewhat weary aspect in front of her that morning, and had also been a frolic in its way, as we have seen,—she was now all agog for what was next to happen, and devoutly trusted no further questions would be put. It would certainly have had a peculiar aspect, to say the least of it, if it had come to light that she had been wandering about for a couple of hours in woods which she had afterward pronounced to be too wet for her friends to pass through! It might have been suspected that she had her own reasons for

wishing to return by the road. The road was the only place where people were ever met going to and from the town of Longminster, four miles off.

"It seemed as if every turn of the road brought some one into view," continued Eleanour Waterfield, who was always considered to know what to say, and how to keep rippling on in the proper drawing-room strain. "The Allens were going by train somewhere, but return to-night, and Mr. Allen says the harvest festival is to be this day fortnight. I suppose we shall send the same kinds of fruit and vegetables as usual. Have you any very large marrows, Lady Caroline?"

"I am afraid I hardly know, Eleanour."

Marrows! And so much on her mind! She could have thrown every marrow in the garden at the speaker's head; and yet she could not but commend in her heart the composure which enabled her young visitor to speak and act as though receiving the best of attention, when it was but too palpable that she had but half one of a distracted hostess's ears, and the same measure of her vacant eyes.

The rest was for Hartland's approaching step. He had made a halt in the ante-room, and had been seen and heard through the open doorway.

In he came with a broken dog-chain in his hand. "Did you ever see such workmanship?" he cried, after due salutations. "How could any one suppose such a thing would hold together? But I am awfully sorry, Lady Caroline; I never dreamed of its giving way; and I will send it up to the maker to-morrow, and tell him to send down another."

"Pray do not trouble about it, Hartland."

"Oh, I am bound to make it good, you know."

"I have no doubt it is an old one and worn out," began Lady Caroline, who to any other delinquent would have looked black as night. "The coachman can be told to get another, and a better. Meantime,

what have you done with Lion ? I hope he is in good hands."

"The brute ! I sent him home. I believe it was his fault the chain broke,—he gave such a spring after me ; but still, a good piece of metal ought to be able to stand a tug or two"; and apparently full of his grievance, he retired to the window recess and looked gloomily out.

"I am afraid we are only a party of ladies, my dear Hartland." Lady Caroline turned her head round, and Lady Julia spun her whole stout little person about likewise, both ladies wishing to face the favorite.

"Are you ?" said he unconsciously.

"Mr. Liscard will be in presently, but hardly, I fear, to luncheon."

"Oh !"

"Did you expect to find me here ?" It was now Julia's turn. "Did you know where I was ?"

"We met the carriage returning."

"So you came after me ?" jocosely.

"I met Rosamund, and came with her."

The pause that ensued made itself felt by all but the speaker ; he had something else on hand. A full-fed, lethargic wasp was slowly crawling up the window-pane, tempting Providence in the shape of Hartland, whose hand stole gently towards it. He was a humane man, but wasps are everybody's game, and in the hand there was an open penknife.

It moved too quickly, and gave the alarm ; the wasp buzzed and flew.

Being gorged, however, and out of condition, a short flight sufficed, and that, being taken in a circle round the adversary's head, and close to his ears, had a stimulating effect. He remained stock-still till the insect had again settled ; and then, swift as lightning, stabbed it through the heart—it being presumed that the heart was in its right place. All was over in the space of a few seconds, and the prey impaled on the point of the knife.

"Well, I call that cruel," said a voice close by.

"Oh no, Miss Waterfield; a wasp is a wasp; if you don't kill him he will—sting, if not kill you. At least that's the theory." He was bound to make some defense.

"Have you many at the Abbey?"

"Swarms," replied Hartland, picking off the one he had disposed of. "I say, here is another, come to see after the last. Come as chief mourner,—now, look, and you will see how I do it. Ho! Missed him! And, by Jove, he's vicious! Look out!" and he pulled the young lady hastily aside,—“he will sting if he has a chance now; he is furious, the villain. Just wait a minute, my boy; I'll—settle your account—for you”—intently watching. "Quiet now, Miss Waterfield, don't you stir: there—he has calmed down now; no, he is off again, the suspicious rascal; he smells the blood of the slain. Now, quietly, quietly. Plague upon him! he is twice the trouble the other was. But I shan't be done—make up your mind to that, my friend; so if it lies between us—" and down came the knife, and the deed was done.

Even Violet Waterfield had been keen on the quarry. "You *are* clever," she now cried, and examined the defunct wasp with more interest than she could have supposed possible.

"It is of no use cutting them in two, you know," said Hartland, and he proceeded to explain.

"What are those two whispering about over there?" exclaimed Lady Caroline, who had twice addressed herself to Lord Hartland, and twice been obliged to end her sentence as though it had been meant for the general circle, which is not a pleasant thing to have to do.

No one now replied.

"Rosamund," said her mother, looking round. *Alas!* she wished she had let Hartland alone, and kept her wits for another encounter. It was too late

now ; a note she had foolishly left lying on the table when interrupted by her first visitor, and which she most particularly desired not to have had seen, was in her daughter's hands, and it was but too evident that Rosamund had neither heard nor seen anything else since it came there.

"Provoking !" muttered Lady Caroline to herself, and her brow once more clouded over. "If I could only have consulted Hartland first ; but now, it will have to be spoken about before them all, and of course Rosamund will get her way." (Aloud.) "What did you say, my dear?" for she was being in her turn addressed.

"When did this come, mamma?"

"What? What have you got there?" and Lady Caroline put up her eye-glass.

"This," said Rosamund, holding up the note, which it was easier to do than to name the writer.

"Oh, that from the barracks," said Lady Caroline, and the glass dropped with a jerk. "I forget when. Some time this morning."

"Have you answered it?"

"Not yet. Your aunt came in."

"What shall you say?" Rosamund was growing bolder every day about this time, and astonished even herself by her presumption and its success. In the present instance this was the more remarkable, in that she was much more moved by inward anxiety about the fate which she well knew hung in the balance as regarded the note and its contents, than appeared. A close observer would have suspected that she cared, but the closest would hardly have gathered how much she cared about the reply to her question.

"Oh, I do not know, I am sure, my dear," was, however, all the satisfaction Lady Caroline deigned to bestow. "It will require consideration. I wish to ask your cousin what he thinks. These regimental luncheons are so very—but still people do go to them, and this time there is some sort of reason for it. We

are invited to lunch with the officers at the barracks, Julia, on the day of the flower-show, at which their band will play. I suppose they mean it politely, and it is a printed card, so I presume we should meet everybody there ; but really I have not thought about it," which was hardly the truth, invitations being, as before hinted, by no means as thick as blackberries at King's Common, where it was known that only the stiffest and grandest of galas met with any favor from the lady of the manor, and where, in consequence, no summons to a little, cosy, informal impromptu ever found its way. Accordingly the large and somewhat florid card, enclosed in a note from the major in command, would have been quite to her ladyship's mind had it not been for the note itself. That was the fly in her ointment, and it was that which Rosamund now held fast.

"What does your mother mean to do, Eleanour?" pursued Lady Caroline, who saw at a glance that Julia would be no help, and, indeed, had not meant to tell her of the dilemma had circumstances not obliged her to do so.

"About Major Gilbert's luncheon-party?" said Eleanour. "I think we shall go—some of us."

"Why do you call it 'Major Gilbert's' party?" corrected Lady Caroline quickly. "The card says, 'Major Gilbert and the officers' of the regiment. I do not suppose that Major Gilbert has anything more to do with it than any of the rest. Major Gilbert is the least presentable of the set, and yet he is the one who always seems to put himself forward."

"Perhaps he may be put forward—a different thing, Lady Caroline. You see, being in command at present, he can hardly help taking the lead," observed Miss Waterfield good-naturedly.

"You must be mistaken, my dear. Majors do not take command. There must be a colonel to do that."

"There is no colonel at present there."

"There must be a colonel *somewhere*." It almost

seemed as if a wrangle were imminent, each knowing about as much or as little as the other of military matters ; but Lady Caroline waived the question. She might be defeated, and she was not sufficiently sure of her ground to care to risk it ; besides, she had something else to say.

"You may be right, Eleanour, in so far that at present the colonel may be on leave ; but if that be the case, I must say it surprises me that his subordinate officer should have so much time on his hands. It seems to me as if this Major Gilbert never has anything to keep him away from amusements ; no duties at home, no calls on his time, nothing, in short, to hinder him from idling away whole days in pleasure."

"Young men must have their recreations," murmured the kind-hearted Julia ; "I am sure you can not wish them to be always at work, Caroline. It makes me quite wretched to hear from Hartland of the dreadful marches they had to make in India, and the hours they had to be drilling in that terrible climate, and—"

"I doubt if they do any drilling at all at Longminster," interrupted her sister. "And as for marching, the only marches Major Gilbert ever takes are over here, or to some other house where he may idle away his time and fancy himself in request. I am sure I—we have shown him plainly enough that there is no occasion for his coming so often. We never intended to make this place a barrack playground ; but he is the sort of person on whom every kind of hint is thrown away. One can not exactly be rude."

No one raised an eye. Lady Caroline was doing herself injustice ; she not only could be, but was, the rudest woman in the world when she chose. Moreover, she was now showing herself to be also the most unwise, since, however much it cost her, she should have refrained from speaking ill of one for whom she entertained so strong a personal animus, in the presence of others, by some of whom, at least, this was

not shared. Even by those who did not particularly care for the Gilbert in question, Lady Caroline, who had more than once partaken of his hospitality, accepted his arm, and been glad to avail herself of his services, was heard with displeasure.

But having now got the bit between her teeth, there was no stopping her.

"There are some people who never know when to go," she proceeded. "If I ask Major Gilbert to luncheon, I do not mean that he is to remain till dinner-time. If he comes over to call, he means to be invited to tea, and is sure to suggest a game of some kind or other afterward. All this would be very well, of course, if he were a friend—if he were on intimate terms with our family; but when we all dislike him—"

"Oh, my dear Caroline—I must really—I can not agree to that. We do not dislike him at the Abbey."

"You do not dislike him, Julia?" Lady Caroline's tone was rising.

"I—no—really, I can not say I do."

"Well, I must say you astonish me, my dear. It was only last week that you agreed with me perfectly about this very Major Gilbert, and I told you how much I wished he would let us alone; and now you change about, and just because others are here—"

"My dear!"

"—Well, my dear, do, pray, say for once what you *do* think. That speaking no evil of anybody is all very well in theory; but for my part, I consider that it leads people into gross untruths. I know you object to Major Gilbert every bit as much as I do, deny it how you may."

"My dear!" Julia was still unable for more than a slight increase of emphasis.

"You told me yourself you could not call him a gentleman," pursued Lady Caroline, hunting her down.

"But still—"

"Oh, if you allow a man is not a gentleman, you may say what you like for him."

"He may be a very—"

"Worthy person," concluded Lady Caroline, with a sneer. "So he may; we will hope he is. All I know is, that his manners are atrocious; that there is in them a mixture of ease and awkwardness which is hardly to be borne; and that I have never seen any good qualities to counterbalance the outward deficiencies. He looks perfectly miserable on entering a room; directly he is treated with bare civility he grows familiar; and by the time he leaves one wonders what he will do next."

Lady Julia looked vexed, but did not speak.

"Hartland, am I not speaking the truth? You, I know, will agree with me?" resumed the speaker, who could hardly help perceiving that no one else did, or that, at all events, nobody approved of so public a declaration of the sentiment. "Hartland?" appealed Lady Caroline; and she turned her chair again toward him, for it had insensibly slid round, as in the warmth of the discussion she had declaimed for the benefit of those on the other side.

"Yes," said Hartland.

"Do you not agree with what I have been saying?"

• He was obliged to own that he did not know what she had been saying.

This was worse than dissent; she grew alarmed. "Do come a little nearer then; I can not shout across the room."

"But it is so hot where you are."

"Hot? Why, it is September."

"It is hot all the same," said Hartland, "and I can hear you perfectly, Lady Caroline. It was only because I was not attending to what you said that I missed knowing what it was." He had disposed of the question, and was free to engage in combat with another wasp.

"As obstinate as any of us!" muttered Lady Caroline to herself—"a Verelst all over! Even in a trifle like this!" and she liked him all the better for it.

If it had been the luckless Gilbert who had thus dared to brave her ! But then Gilbert had not been born a Verelst ; and moreover, Lord Hartland in himself was precisely the one man whom Lady Caroline could have fancied, could have loved, had she been young, and free, and—thwarted. The last only would have been needed to have made her idolize him ; and even now,—even as she was,—wife, mother, middle-aged woman, and county lady,—she cared that he should notice her, attend to her, lean over her chair, and tell her, as he alone presumed to do, that her gown or bonnet was becoming. She desired that he should become her son-in-law, but it may be questioned whether she would have liked seeing him altogether Rosamund's.

Just now everything seemed against her. There was Hartland laughing like a boy, and holding—yes, indeed, clutching with both hands—Violet Waterfield's black velvet hat ; dashing it too, regardless of consequences, up and down the window pane ! And there was Violet—the almost pretty Violet, the best-looking of the Waterfields, at any rate—standing by his side and looking on with a placid smile and participating interest ! Something amusing, not sentimental, was going on, no doubt ; but even amusing nonsense may be dangerous when it is not shared by all the party. Why was not Rosamund in the jest ? Rosamund had neither spoken nor moved for a long time.

At Hartland's plain-spoken rejoinder she did, however, rouse herself. “ Can you not see how much of his attention Hartland is bestowing on you, mamma ? ” she said bitterly ; “ but, of course, you take it for granted that he shares your sentiments, and to-morrow we shall be told whose they are, and what is Hartland's opinion. My cousin is very good to be so respectfully silent when you speak ; but he might remember that he is taking away the character of a man—”

“ He ? Hartland ? ”

"You are, and as Hartland does not stop you, it is to be supposed he agrees."

"I take away any one's character!" said Lady Caroline, coloring up.

"And say the most cruel, false things—"

"False!"

"You speak of Major Gilbert as if he were some low man."

"So he may be."

"You know that he is not."

"I do not, indeed. I know nothing about him."

"You know that he is the major of his regiment."

"Exactly, and that is all."

"You have set yourself against him ever since he came into the neighborhood."

"Certainly I have disliked him from the first."

"Why? For what? You had no reason. He has never given you any. Neither he nor any of his brother officers have ever shown us anything but kindness—"

"Kindness! Absurd!"

"Civility you would call it, I suppose. And what civility have we ever shown them in return?"

"They come over often—" began Lady Caroline.

"Come over! Yes, 'come over.' That is just what they do. They ask us to the best they have to give, and we go to it: we go to their ball and anything else, and make use of them in any way we can; but we only let them come here to a wretched garden-party—"

"Oh, now, Rosamund," protested her aunt, who felt she could take part with Caroline now; "now my dear, you really are in the wrong. Hartland has them to dine and shoot constantly, and—"

"Yes, you, Aunt Julia; and Hartland, I suppose," conceded Rosamund; "but I am speaking of ourselves. *We* have never done anything for anybody—we never do."

"What have you then in this special instance to

complain of?" said Lady Caroline, quailing a little, as she had begun to do of late when Rosamund's blood was up. "If we have not kept open house for the neighborhood, as it appears you think we ought to have done, what have Major Gilbert and his brother officers more than others against us?"

But Rosamund was now past logic.

"I say it is a shame—a wicked, wicked shame," she cried, "the moment people's backs are turned, to scorn them and run them down, and make out that we are better than they, and that they are not fit company for us. I say it is not fair to meet, and talk, and smile, and shake hands, and pretend that all is pleasant and nice, and the moment they are out of sight, fall upon them, and stir each other up to say the unkindest, untruest things—"

"Of whom are you speaking, Rosamund?"

"Of you, mamma." In Rosamund's burning, fiery eyes there was no sign of flinching. "Of you, and Aunt Julia, and Hartland," she went on. "Do you think I care if you are angry? I don't. *I* am angry; *I* am ashamed. If no one else feels how horribly, how heartlessly, how shamefully we have all been behaving toward these—these—poor—friends of ours, *I* do. They have only been among us a short time, and they are very soon going away, and I do not suppose we shall ever see any of them again. They are nothing to *me*. It is not that I care—that I mind—that I—why do you look at me like that? It is only that I hate injustice, and meanness, and hypocrisy, and especially towards those who have been so—been so kind to us,—” and all at once, to the unutterable consternation of the whole circle, the passionate lips parted in a loud sob, and the sentence remained unfinished.

If a bombshell had exploded in their midst, it could not have been more appalling to all present.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT WAS HIS BOAST THAT HE WAS A LADIES' MAN.

"What reason can there be assigned
For this perverseness of the mind?
Brutes find out where their talents lie;
A bear will not attempt to fly;
A foundered horse will not debate
Before he tries a five-barred gate;
A dog by instinct turns aside
Who sees the ditch too deep and wide :—
But man we find the only creature
Who, led by folly, combats Nature;
Who, when she loudly calls 'Forbear,'
With obstinacy fixes there;
And where his genius least inclines,
Absurdly bends his whole designs."

—SWIFT.

SOME sort of explanation of the foregoing scene must now be offered to the reader.

The Major Gilbert who had been for the nonce the apple of discord had, as may have been gathered, only recently come to the neighborhood, and taken the command at the garrison stationed in the old-fashioned county town of Longminster. He was a man of five-and-thirty, with a fine tall figure, a handsome set of features, a square, determined brow, closely clipped hair, and a mustache. Further, he was an excellent soldier, respectable in his private life, and though not drawing too tight a bow, considered a good man for youngsters to be under—one who would keep a brisk look-out as to what went on, and not stand nonsense. As, however, the major was neither unsympathetic nor injudicious, he was popular enough—indeed rather a favorite than otherwise in the mess-room; while once outside barracks there *was generally felt to be no better comrade going.*

Among women, of the class he belonged to, he was equally lucky; the sort of girls whom he was wont to meet, the friends of his sisters and his cousins at home, the not over-refined denizens of garrison towns abroad found him quite to their taste; and it was indeed the boast of his secret soul that he was a ladies' man.

But he had never known really good society. He came of wealthy folks, but neither parent had risen, nor had cared to rise, above a somewhat humble origin; and he himself was the show member of the family. By his own people he was considered smart, and knowing, and decidedly genteel. When he visited from time to time the paternal dwelling, sat down at the paternal board, and slept beneath the paternal roof, everything had to be at its best. Poor old Mr. Gilbert would be forced willy-nilly to put on a better coat for dinner, and to see if he could not find a chair fit to sit in in the large unused drawing-room afterward. The meals would be better, more plentiful; the extra silver would be put out, and the girls themselves would remind the housemaid that their brother liked to have hot water brought to his room three or four times a day. Still, as Frederick was an amiably disposed sybarite, no one felt this piece of luxury to be exacting on his part; rather it may be questioned whether he would not have gone down a peg in the general esteem had he not, in his own phrase, made the household pull itself together.

On cold nights he wanted a fire in his bed-room; on the light mornings in summer he must have his windows darkened with double blinds; and all the year round he had his great bath filled to the brim, and put out in the midst of a circle of bath-blankets, towels, rubbing-brushes, and what not, on a certain spot in his room on the evening of his arrival. Before he went to bed at night, if everything about that bath were not in readiness for the morning's plunge,

it mattered not how late it were, peal would go the major's bell.

By his two sisters, Emily and Henrietta, or Em and Etta, as he was wont to style them, Frederick was much beloved. He represented in their eyes all that was gayest and pleasantest in their lives. He petted them, and made them presents. He was applied to, to procure them indulgences and exemptions. Their parents, having married late in life, had grown too old to care for jaunts and merry-making before these younger ones of the family had grown up; and having from a series of domestic bereavements got finally into the habit of going nowhere, would not, save for Frederick's intervention, have seen the necessity for any one else's going anywhere either. Frederick stood between this doom and his little sisters, of whom he was fond after a Grand Mogul fashion, and whose devotion to him and belief in him were all that the vainest heart could have required. He was many years their senior, the three being all that were left of a fairly numerous family; but it was their glory that, instead of holding aloof from their society, as some brothers would have done, Frederick liked nothing better than to have one hanging on each arm, or seated on either side, and, with his cigar in his mouth, to narrate, discourse, and ring the changes on every sort of experience, of which the principally recurring features would be, "I did, I said, I thought." This much must, however, be said for him: as his own trumpeter, he was indubitably without a rival; but he had, on the other hand, fits of humility and self-depreciation which almost puzzled his auditors.

They thought he must be mistaken when now and again he was fain to own having made a blunder or received a rebuff; or when he would, as he did, occasionally say straight out, "I am not up to that," or, "I have no notion what ought to be done in such a case."

Em would raise her eyes to read in his if he were

serious in making such an admission, and Etta would almost be angry with him for it; but although he would be gratified by their blind fidelity, he would stick to his point. No, he was not infallible; he knew a thing or two, but not everything; there were people who had seen lots more of the world and of life than he had. There were places in which he was not quite at home, and occasions which, in plain terms, bothered him. However—and then the good little sisters were given to understand that, in spite of all, he was still a long way superior to *them*, and well ahead of any one *they* knew; and that in coming home among his own people, and putting up with all their oddities and ignorances, he was condescending and forbearing.

He needed not to have insinuated it. No supposition to the contrary had ever arisen in the minds of the pair; and on reaching the recognized age of young-ladyhood, the height of the ambition either possessed was to obtain his approval and merit still more of his confidence.

Happily for the two, an audience was as necessary to Gilbert as a hero to them—so there was no fear of a cessation of the long talks in the greenhouse, or the garden. One of these had, just at the time we have now arrived at, elicited a tremendous secret. The absentee had run home on business, and what should the business turn out to be?

After guessing three times, according to precedent, the last guess had hit the mark as nearly as possible. No, he would not say he was going to be married; but he had come home in order to ask the governor what he would do for him in the event of his desiring to take to himself a wife.

The governor, on learning who the wife in question was, had professed himself satisfied, and had agreed to do the thing handsomely. All had been so much to his mind that he had thought he must let Em and Etta into the secret, before he went back to propose.

The two clapped their hands over the delightful news. He was in love at last? And *really*? Not just—he knew what. Oh, he knew well enough what they meant. He had always laughed so before, when they had asked him if anything were to come of this and that flirtation, and had said that the one he had flirted with was all very well for a time, but that he could not stand too much of her—or something of the kind. But then he had never come home before, and asked papa, and spoken about money, and—oh, they could hardly believe it, it was such fun!

Frederick pulled his long mustache with complacency. He loved to be the object of such a commotion. If they would only be quiet, he promised to tell them everything.

"Be quiet, do, then, Em," cried Etta, who was by far the more excited of the two. "We shall never hear anything if we don't let Frederick speak. Now, Frederick, do speak—do go on—do tell us all about her—and about *it*—and how it began—and where you met—and what you felt at the first. Now, do begin at the very beginning—"

"If I am ever to begin at all! Lord! what a tongue you have, Etta!"

"And then she tells me to be quiet," quoth the aggrieved Emily.

"Never mind that. Let Frederick speak. How old is she, Frederick? And what is she like? And is she pretty?"

"Go on—go on."

"Only one thing more. Is she dark, or fair? And is she like either of us?"

He looked at her, and then at his other sister, and another countenance rose before his eyes. He shook his head.

"Oh, of course you will say she is ever so much nicer," cried Etta gayly. "And so I dare say she is, if we could only hear about her. But you are so mysterious—"

At last they had it all. He was in love, really, and truly, and marryingly in love this time. He had never been so before in his life, but he was done for at last. As for his little girl, she was very young, younger than either of them—

“But we are only twenty and twenty-one,” protested Etta.

All the same she was younger ; she was only eighteen—

“And you are five-and-thirty !”

But this was not a lucky remark, and she was somewhat sharply informed that a man may be as much older than his bride as he chooses ; and moreover, that it was an error on the right side : and furthermore, that women aged sooner than men—with more of the kind.

Etta listened with impatience. Of course, of course ; she did not care twopence about the age, for her part ; she wanted to hear about the girl, about Rosamund ; what a pretty name it was, and so uncommon ! and was Rosamund herself pretty also ?

Very pretty indeed. More than pretty, beautiful. The sort of face—and here the speaker paused ; even he hardly liked to say to his sisters, “The sort of face *you* never see, and hardly know enough to admire if you did.” He had dimly felt that he himself was but just able to appreciate the difference between the proud lip and noble brow of Rosamund Liscard, and the ordinary red and white prettiness of the damsels he was in the habit of taking for his standard.

“Pretty, and young,” quoth Emily, summing up ; “well, Frederick, what else ? Is she well dressed and stylish looking ?”

Frederick put out his chin. “My dear girls ! Stylish looking ! She is an earl’s granddaughter !”

“Oh—h !” The joint exclamation and the expressions of the two awe-stricken listeners were a sight to see. That they had dared to ask if an earl’s granddaughter were stylish looking !

"I don't know if you would call her well dressed," proceeded their brother, trying not to seem too much aware of the crushing impression he had produced. "She looks tip-top in whatever she puts on. It's generally white of an evening, I think. It's not the thing for girls to dress very much, you know."

"No," assented Etta humbly; "I—I suppose, then, that"—(for the life of her she could not call the earl's granddaughter "Rosamund")—"I suppose that she—she does not dress much?"

"Well, all the better," cried Emily, recovering; "and I don't suppose she can be very high and mighty, and give herself airs, if she means to marry one of us—at least,"—and she paused, for it occurred to her that Frederick, being so very fine and spruce, and such a great man altogether, might have unconsciously given an erroneous idea of the family to the "earl's granddaughter," in which there was no saying what Rosamund might turn out to be.

Frederick, however, was reassuring. "No, she doesn't give herself airs," he said, with a slight stress upon the "she,"—"and I should think you would all get on capitally together. But if you take my advice, you'll steer clear of some one else, who tries to boss the whole party—and that's the mother. She's the most infernally proud woman, that Lady Caroline."

"Lady Caroline!" almost whispered Emily. She had never known a "Lady" Anybody in her life.

"Is she—is she—?" suggested Henrietta, and paused, scarcely knowing in what direction to inquire.

"Oh, *she's* a monkey-puzzler if you like," replied her brother readily. "There is not an inch of her you can approach without a prick. She is a caution, and no mistake. I can tell you sometimes when I go up those stone stairs, and follow the men across the hall, and hear them bellow out "Major Gilbert" in front of me into that huge drawing-room where she sits, always at the far end, always making a fellow have to walk the whole length before he gets

up to her, I would almost sooner face a Bengal tigress, alone and unarmed. Look, this is how she does it," and he put them off him, for they were leaning on either shoulder, that he might rise and show the scene properly. "You come in from over there, Emily, and I am Lady Caroline here,—see, this is her davenport,—I believe she lives at that davenport; I never enter the room but she is sitting in front of it, writing; and her long, blue back, for she has the ugliest blue gown you ever saw, and is never out of it—her long back bending forward, seems as if it would take an hour to straighten. But isn't it like a poker when she does get up! Now, Em,—look, this is her exactly,"—and poor Lady Caroline was travestied to admiration, at the very moment, as luck would have it, when her ladyship was, with equal acrimony, though with a less appreciative audience, dilating upon the major himself.

Whether their respective ears tingled, history saith not, but Gilbert had undoubtedly the best of it in point of sport. Shouts of laughter greeted his performance, and he had to go through it again and again ere he was allowed even to improve and dilate.

"She has taken an especial dislike to your humble servant," he owned candidly. "I am sure I don't know what I have done to get into her black books, but there is no mistaking the fact that I am there. It may be that she imagines me to be some poor devil without a sixpence—and that would not suit her book for the fair Rosamund. As soon as she finds that I can make a rattling good settlement—and the governor is a regular trump to come down so handsomely, I can tell you, girls—I expect old Blue-gown will be glad enough to have me; for they have a large family to provide for, and a lot of them are boys. Perhaps I may be allowed to shake her whole hand for once. So far, she has only vouchsafed me a couple of fingers perfectly cold with condescension;

and when she takes my arm, Lord ! I'd as soon have a daddy-long-legs tickle it !"

The sisters laughed heartily.

"It's not that I mind," proceeded Gilbert, in great good-humor ; "I don't care two skips of a grass-hopper for all her highy-tighty airs,—though I do think it is despicable to snub a fellow just because he is supposed to be poor ; but it's vexatious, because it prevents my having a good time of it with Rosamund ; and to tell the truth, though I am on the brink of my offer, I have not had half the opportunities I ought to have had for—well, you know what."

"Of course," said Emily sagaciously. "You want to find out whether she cares for you, and carry on, and all that. You are such a flirt too, Frederick, I should have thought you would have made your opportunities."

"Well, yes, so I have—in a way. But you see, Rosamund is not a flirting girl. You have to mind your P's and Q's a little with these kind of people ; and though I think, indeed I know, she likes me—"

"Likes you ! I thought you said she would accept you to-morrow ?"

"Well—hum—accept—did I say that ? I said I meant to try, and my belief is that I shan't try in vain. But you must understand, my dear girls, that you have to be uncommonly careful with girls like Rosamund. They are taught never to show what they feel."

"Are they ? Dreadful !"

"And though she is the nicest, merriest, liveliest little creature in the world, she is not one you get to know all in a moment. I have had to draw my toes in more than once when I thought we were fast friends ; but if any one else treats me badly, you should see how prettily she tries to make amends. It is *that* more than anything which shows me she really does care. The other day—let me see—what was it that was said ? Oh, I know. Lady Caroline was *talking away to her particular friend Mrs. Waterfield—*

the Waterfields ain't bad ; but there's a little hair on their legs ; they are not up to the Liscards. Well, says my lady with her venomous smile, 'Oh, my *de-ah* Mrs. Waterfield'—that's the way she speaks—'my *de-ah* Mrs. Waterfield,'—no, I believe it was 'my *de-ah* Beatrice,' for they are by way of being very thick.. 'My *de-ah* Beatrice, I am so delighted to hear that we are to have your nephew's regiment quartered here directly. It *is* good news. They tell me the order is given, and that there will be a change directly.' Not so fast, my lady, thinks I ; the order may be given, and the regiment may go, but I have not heard of it,—and anyway, you don't get rid of *me* so easily. Well, you know, when she said it, even the Waterfields, who keep in with her at all hazards, looked disgusted ; and as for Rosamund, all I know is, I wished Lady Caroline would say something nasty every day of my life. You should have seen how my girl colored up, and what a blaze her eyes were in !"

"And yet you don't feel sure about her ?"

But it was evident he was as sure as he cared to be. He had the sense not to desire more absolute certainty, and the pluck to be willing to run the risk.

"There's Hartland, of course," he said. "He's the game Lady Caroline flies at, as any one can see. He is the earl, the head of the family, a lucky young beggar who came in for the title through a series of deaths. But he is not thinking of marrying ; and when he does, he will go in for an heiress—he must marry money, for he has only what the spinster sister, Lady Julia, allows him ; and people say she can't make him her heir, even if she wished."

"I wonder what Agnes Chandler will say," observed Emily, who had been ruminating on matters more within her range.

"Oh, Agnes Chandler ! Agnes Chandler was all very well, but they were a scrubby lot. A fellow has to think of his family. I liked Agnes uncommonly, and we were tremendous friends,—and, by Jove, what

a dancer she was, and what spins we used to have on that old floor ! But you must look for something a cut above Agnes when you talk of a wife. Poor Agnes ! she was very fond of me too."

"And so was poor Amelia," nodded Etta.

"Well, Amelia ; no—no—I drew the line there. I never really went in for Amelia. She would fancy I did : and of course, if that is the case, you can not be unkind ; and I had to accept her presents, and she expected some sort of attentions in return ; and somehow old Smith had a rare good cellar, and you met every one there, and there was no getting out of it : there was no eluding the Smiths. The rout came just in time ; I dare say she has had a dozen since we left."

"And if you had not found your Rosamund, you would have had a dozen also."

"Very possibly. That shows what one gets by waiting. Now there are Wilson and Davis of ours, they are such noodles ; directly we arrive in quarters, they prospect around, and fix upon the first passable girl they come across, and there they are at once, booked. They can't cry off, even if they want to afterward ; because when the better girls appear on the scene, they feel so confoundedly foolish. But Webster and I, we are the wily ones. We lie low for a week or so, and look about us. Then we get invited to the good houses, and are free to make our choice. I have never had a flirtation with any but a nice girl yet."

"Which is saying a good deal, Master Fred."

"All owing to discrimination, my little dears. All owing to your sapient brother's keeping a cool head on his shoulders, and putting a proper value on his proper person. And he is a bit of a favorite too, I can tell you ; oh, I know how to creep up the sleeve with the fair sex, trust me. I sing 'em a song ; I tickle their fancies with 'You'll remember me,' and that sort of thing. That's the way of it. Get to sentiment, and they're done for."

"Has Rosamund heard you sing?"

"Only once. And never once in her own house. Old Blue-gown knows better than to ask me. I had my music in my coat-pocket the last day I was over there, and Webster was over with me, and it turned out beastly wet, so I thought I had a rare chance, as they set Webster down to play the organ,—he plays it uncommonly well, the little chap does,—so I thought here was an opening; and after a bit, I gave 'em a hint; I suggested, couldn't we have a glee, or a catch, or something? My word! you don't see me doing that again. She would hardly deign me an answer at all; and the organ and everything else was stopped right away, and wet or fine, Webster and I had to tramp it. No; to tell you the real truth, girls, it gives me a regular shiver down to the heels of my boots, whenever I do but think of that Lady Caroline."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST MEETING.

" Yes, I'm in love, I feel it now,
And Celia has undone me ;
And yet I swear I can't tell how
The pleasing pain stole on me."

—WHITEHEAD.

IN consonance with the tactics which he had been so good as to expound for his sisters' benefit in the last chapter, Major Gilbert had kept somewhat aloof from the society of the town, directly he had found he might obtain that of the county, on taking command at Longminster.

His position had entitled him to the civilities of the neighboring magnates, and he had fully realized that his last promotion had opened doors for him hitherto closed—or partially so, and had not been slow to avail himself of his new opportunities.

He had met Rosamund, and had been convinced anew of the soundness of his policy.

No Agnes nor Amelia was there now to hold him back ; no unfortunate trammels bound him.

Let us take a retrospective glance at the first meeting.

Mrs. Waterfield had invited Major Gilbert over to the Grange on a lovely June day, and had also bidden other guests, and intended to have an out-of-door afternoon party. But when the Thursday came, the weather was so inauspicious that only Gilbert himself appeared, on the chance of its clearing, and by-and-by Rosamund Liscard drove her pony-cart over to *present Lady Caroline's* excuses. Rosamund was *made to stay*,—the Grange being, as we have already

said, the only other house besides the Abbey for which she had this permission, and Lady Caroline little dreaming that a blow could be dealt to her through such an apparently innocent medium.

Rosamund thought Major Gilbert a fine-looking man, and an agreeable addition to the party. She was attached to the Miss Waterfields, and was fain not to find them poor company,—well knowing that if they had been a shade more hilarious or vivacious, they would have been withheld from her grasp, as other tempting morsels had been. She had yearned after this one and that, congenial damsels with whom she would fain have held sweet converse, not finding a responsive spirit in her next sister, the prim Catherine; but Lady Caroline had put a prompt veto upon every new intimacy, permitting only the old and well-worn Waterfields,—and with them accordingly her daughters had to be content. But it must not therefore be inferred that, left to herself, Rosamund did not secretly cherish much the same opinion of the septet that her mother did.

They were wholesome—like rice pudding. You could take a little of them day after day without their palling too flagrantly on the palate,—at the same time you could never take very much at a time. They were, in short, good wear-and-tear neighbors, to be depended on for sturdy principles and old-established prejudices, and certain not to develop any new or startling vagaries.

But imagine what a godsend was Gilbert in such a house!

Thus met, when he was naturally on his best behavior, he now merely appeared to be a frank, soldierly man, handsome, well dressed, and very ready to be pleased with everything. In their terror at seeing the unknown visitor turn up on a hopelessly wet afternoon, and their relief at finding him not only willing to be entertained but eager to entertain in return, he had been first the object of solicitude, and

then of graceful surprise and admiration. One after another had been drawn into the circle round him, and Rosamund, coming in, found quite a lively party in the drawing-room, which, but for resolute cheerfulness, must have looked as forlorn as a summer room, whose fireplace is blocked up by flowers, usually does when the rain-pools cover the lawn, and the skies are still pouring forth in floods at intervals.

No one, however, looked depressed on this occasion, and it was easy to see that to the one man of the party all the life and vivacity of it was due.

Gilbert was in his element. Nothing suited him better than such a position ; and he had already said many pretty things of the neighborhood, and given every sort of intimation of his good-humor, when Rosamund—Rosamund looking her loveliest, with moist, clear eyes, and a damask-rose bloom upon her cheek, fresh from the outer air—brought a new atmosphere into the circle. In an instant all was changed for Gilbert, and he had fallen, metaphorically, at her feet ; but he did not allow himself to show that it was so.

He stood up, of course, and when his turn came made his bow, and was a little more officious than he need have been in wheeling forward another chair ; but still he remembered to beg Eleanour's pardon for so nearly brushing her with his elbow, and stooped to pick up Mrs. Waterfield's ball of gray worsted which was rolling away under the ottoman. He remembered that he had a "gallery," that he was under inspection, and that he had heard the Grange spoken of as an excellent stepping-stone toward admission in the neighborhood.

Accordingly he did not, as he longed to do, at once turn his back upon the seven Miss Waterfields (for Diana was also present, it being a half-holiday) ; he did not let it be apparent that all interest in their pale, faint-colored faces had left him at the first vision of the brilliant new-comer ; he only stood

aside, pulling his long mustache, and marking the contrast with keen, observant eyes, until it was again time for him to speak ; and he did not rush to take possession of the vacant seat by Rosamund's side presently, but stepped backward and forward, handing tea, sugar, and cakes, till all were supplied,—even then volunteering to pour fresh water into the teapot, albeit the coveted chair still remained empty. Such self-restraint said something for the bold soldier, and he owed himself some measure of reward for it.

But he was cautious even in taking the reward ; a renewal of talk and jest led to anecdotes and sleight-of-hand tricks, of which he was a master ; and these last were performed with such an effort at impartiality as led to Rosamund's being only addressed twice as often as was her turn, and shown the secret of the best performance, to the exclusion of all the rest, though Diana had already more than half found it out.

For the further gratification of a musical community, as evidenced by the books piled up in the corner, Gilbert next proposed music ; and on this occasion nobody snuffed out the proposition, as was subsequently the case at King's Common. On the contrary, the idea was caught at in a house where, as Lady Caroline said, the piano never ceased, and where an additional voice, and that a bass one, was a delightful acquisition.

All seven sisters eagerly gathered round the music-stool, all turning over different things, in vain endeavors to make their knowledge agree ; and Rosamund, who had but an indifferent ear, and had never been at the pains to improve it, now regretted for the first time the success of many stratagems for shortening the hour of practice, which, under Miss Penrose, had been the daily torment of her life.

Since her escape from school-room rule, she had never touched a note, and, left to herself, would seldom have cared to hear one. But then the music

in request at King's Common was not inspiring, and there was in reality no chance for any one not of strictly classical proclivities knowing how much or how little he or she was capable of appreciating simpler melody.

Was my heroine now to be left out in the cold, in consequence?

Nothing of the kind. She could not sing—ah! but she could be sung to.

And so it came to pass that whatever and whenever Major Gilbert sang, it was to her he turned for commands, for sympathy, and for applause. She might shift her place, but if she did he also shifted his. She might get behind one, or another; in a few minutes he had so placed himself that she was again within range. She might move forward, take the arm of a sister, talk in her ear, be interested, engrossed,—it was all the same; she knew that he paused expectantly till she had done, and that she would either be addressed anew over the heads of the others, or find him at her elbow, in another minute.

He might read the words of a part-song over Amy's shoulder, or share the book with Violet, but Rosamund felt, by that intuition which never fails, that she and she alone was his real audience.

Then he had sung by himself.

His voice was deep and rich, not particularly expressive, but easy, and, after a certain fashion, agreeable to listen to. He could warble a love-ditty with effect, dropping his voice till it was almost tender at the pathetic passages; while in a rattling sea-song he could bang about the accompaniment famously, and puff out his chest like a topsail in a gale of wind.

He did not stick fast to the music-stool, moreover. He turned about upon it once or twice, it is true, and struck a chord here and there, and inquired if they knew this thing and that; but after a very reasonable

time he insisted, with creditable pertinacity, upon some one else's taking his place, and listened respectfully to his successor throughout the full length of six pages.

Altogether the whole thing was well done. Had she had a son at home, Mrs. Waterfield would have asked him to stop and dine. She did not even find him noisy on this occasion; and happily for him, he was held so completely in check by a variety of feelings throughout the visit, that he did not once relapse into vulgar jocularity or familiar facetiousness.

"He was really most obliging and entertaining." It was the lady of the house who spoke, but she expressed the sentiments of all. "He could not have been more good-natured; and it must have been a disappointment when the day turned out so miserably bad. I wish we had not had to let him go back in the rain, but I could not well help it. Another time, when some of the boys are at home, or when we have some other gentlemen with us, we must have him again. I must hear that charming sailor's song once more," for it had been a blessed change from the eternal sonatas and *thèmes* of which even her maternal ear was occasionally sick.

"Perhaps he may have something of a barrack-room manner," proceeded Mrs. Waterfield, not knowing that to the barrack-room was due the only thin gloss of good-breeding Gilbert was capable of taking on. "He may laugh a little too loud, and talk a little too loud, and be a little too easy" (how could she guess that the bold soldier was even at that moment pondering how it was that he had not managed to get on faster in his intimacy, and inclined to feel he might have pushed ahead a little more with herself?), "but I am sure he meant no harm," continued the speaker; "and I can quite fancy that to a man away from his home, the sight of a family party like ours must have been tantalizing. He seemed quite one of ourselves before he left."

"And he talked so nicely about his sisters," added Eleanor.

Everybody had something good to say of him ; and though Rosamund said less than the rest, it was only because she thought the more.

She felt proud, gratified, demure. She, too, had liked the deep sea-song, and had not objected to the tremble in the love-sick warble. She now experienced a sensation hitherto unknown when hearing Gilbert's name in every mouth ; and there was all the charm of novelty in secretly hugging to herself the conviction that while he was the hero of the hour, and all were eager to recall what he had said and done, she, and she alone, had been the object of his attention.

Could any one's vanity have been insensible to such a whisper ?—more especially the vanity of eighteen, hitherto kept within the closest watch and ward ? A sudden and dangerous exhilaration made Rosamund's blood dance in her veins as she recounted the history of the afternoon, in so far as it could be recounted, to her mother. When Lady Caroline, on the Waterfields' authority, thereupon admitted the new-comer to her solemn reunions, the daughter of the house was in a flutter of expectation, and met him with shy but evident pleasure. In the interval between their first and second meeting he had been continually in her thoughts, and she had been even more so in his ; so that when he made his appearance at King's Common, and that before the Waterfield party had arrived, it seemed to the only person present who had met him before that she was his friend, and he under her care ; moreover, that it was only natural he should take possession of her on the instant, as he lost no time in doing.

For he had no notion of being backward any more, after he had once been invited to King's Common. That he took to mean that he had won his point, and made all the running required.

The alacrity with which he drew near to Rosamund's side, and his tenacious hold of that position subsequently, fairly took Lady Caroline's breath away. "He actually rushed at her," she declared afterwards; "walked her off from among all the other people, engrossed her whole attention—which she was foolish enough to permit him to do; but she is so young, she does not yet know how to manage,—and I do assure you, Julia, that the man never spoke to any one else, never let her alone for an instant throughout the whole afternoon afterward. I explained to Rosamund her mistake in allowing it, as soon as I could do so, and desired her to be careful: but the next thing was the ball. We went to the ball, as you know; and of course I could understand that, as the principal host on that occasion, Major Gilbert should dance first with my daughter. It was her right, and I had no fault to find: no one else was there who could have taken the *pas*. But, my dear, the way he hung about her throughout the evening, made her order the music, have extra waltzes, so as to enable them to linger in the supper-room, the air with which he shawled her up for the carriage, and took her out himself, and stood there in the cold night-draughts—oh, my dear Julia, the whole thing was unmistakable! I was at my wits' end; and I could do nothing,—it was their own entertainment, and they had the right to order things as they chose; and though, of course, people must have remarked upon it, I could not then and there go up to Major Gilbert and say, 'I will not permit my daughter to be made so conspicuous,'—I had to let things take their course,"—the truth—the plain unvarnished truth—being, that on the occasion referred to Lady Caroline herself had been by no means above experiencing gratification at beholding her fair young daughter the belle of the ball.

So long, indeed, as she had been persuaded that all the devotion and admiration was confined to his side,

she had endured Gilbert ; but of late there had been felt a creeping sensation of alarm, which could not even be confided to Julia, and which had found its easiest vent in an ever-increasing dislike and intolerance of his name. This, in her folly, she had been unable to keep to herself, and had thus increased the very evil she dreaded.

Every generous feeling Rosamund possessed was soon aroused on behalf of one who, suspecting nothing, was being daily scorned and sneered at, to whom the lowest motives for every action were invariably imputed, and whose simplest civility was misconstrued. Had her mother but permitted the little flutter about the handsome soldier to die out of itself, there is no saying how soon this might have happened ; but instead she had actually fanned the flame she dreaded, and we know the result.

For the moment she was overmastered in spite of herself. For her—a woman who had never brooked opposition in her life—it was absolutely terrible to be thus openly defied. And she had not had even a chance of entering the lists ere all was over. Those tears, those dreadful tears !

She could almost have wept herself ; and then, to make matters still worse, and complete the whole, the passionate girl, unable to command herself, and overcome by her victory still more than she would have been by a defeat, rushed like a coward from the room.

“She has such a warm heart !” explained Lady Caroline, with a withering smile. “We all know Rosamund.”

CHAPTER X.

UNSKILLFUL TACTICS.

"Ne'er with your children act the tyrant's part,
'Tis yours to guide, not violate the heart."

—THOMSON.

THE amiable Waterfields were only second to Lady Caroline herself in their perturbation and distress at Rosamund's indiscretion. Gilbert had been introduced to the Liscards by them, and it had been on their recommendation—their somewhat overwarm recommendation, as they were fain to call it afterward—that he had been admitted within the sacred precincts of King's Common.

We know how happily had been timed his first appearance at the Grange, but it is due to the ladies then assembled to state that, with the exception of the youthful and inexperienced Rosamund, the impression then made had speedily been lessened by after-acquaintance. Very soon had each and all made up her mind that slight were his claims to anything beyond a passing notice ; for, not having been blinded by themselves being objects of his bold attentions, and further, having had some experience of the world whereof poor Rosamund had seen literally nothing, the sisters had ended by being disgusted, not only with the pert jocularity and forward pretensions of the roystering soldier, but with themselves for having given him a moment's encouragement.

"It shows one can not be too careful," had been Mrs. Waterfield's conclusion ; and she and Lady Caroline had shaken their heads very comfortably over the subject, so long as Lady Caroline, looking

upon Gilbert as the sole offender, had been able to ease herself of a grievance that, in truth, gave her no real uneasiness.

Assuming, vulgar upstart as this man was, he was still at the head of the neighboring military quarter; and his running after her daughter in season and out of season, though it was a piece of unbounded presumption, and could not be loudly enough denounced, was something to be secretly rather proud of than otherwise. She triumphantly informed Julia of Rosamund's conquest.

"As for Beatrice Waterfield's girls, my dear, he passed them over without giving them a second glance. It was at their house, you know, he met Rosamund; and no doubt any one of them would have been happy enough to have been distinguished by him. Oh, I mean no harm; Beatrice's daughters are all well behaved,—but, at any rate, he had been asked there, and there he met Rosamund. I do not altogether blame him—that is to say, I should not have blamed him, if he had not made her so conspicuous. It is tiresome for her to be marked out in the way Major Gilbert does it. She, poor child, is quite unconscious"—(which was all Lady Caroline knew about it)—"and my hope is that when he finds he makes no way with her, and receives no encouragement from me, he will give over coming to the house."

To make assurance doubly sure, she had soon after this begun the line of conduct which had roused to opposition the self-willed young lady. She had omitted no opportunity of throwing out innuendoes, and conveying insinuations; and, worst mistake of all, had ceased not on any and every possible opportunity to draw comparisons between Gilbert and the favored Hartland.

With her, Hartland could do no wrong, Gilbert no right.

Now when this is the case with an undisciplined and uncontrolled nature, prone to force its own opin-

ions, aversions, and predilections upon all around, it may well be seen that nothing can be more injurious to the end in view than such unskillful tactics.

The partial light in which the young peer was viewed by his elderly relation served indeed to make the servants doubly obsequious and obliging, and Mr. Liscard easy about inviting Hartland to stop dinner whenever he found him on the premises of an afternoon; but it did him harm rather than good with the member of the family whom it was most desirable to conciliate. Rosamund's sense of justice was revolted; she could not endure to hear Hartland praised for what would have been not only a *faux pas*, but a positive social crime in any other person: Hartland would come over in the twilight, ask to stop on, and excuse himself for sitting down to table in his shooting-clothes, because he had let the time slip by till it was too late to go back and change—and Lady Caroline would only find it friendly and relationally of him to do so. But woe betide any other youth who had ventured on such a liberty! What would have been thought of the Liscard boys, for instance, nearer by far in point of blood than this new-comer, if they had treated their aunt in so casual a fashion? No one was more nice about the trifling proprieties, and less likely to overlook what she would have termed a slovenly disregard for them, than Lady Caroline. The poor young Liscards shook in their shoes every time they entered her august presence; the poor lads could hardly be induced to go to the house; and as for offering themselves for any mortal thing, and purposely letting the time pass till it was inconvenient to make ready for it, they would as soon have thought of intruding *en déshabille* into the presence of their sovereign.

Sometimes Rosamund longed to shake Hartland on his throne. She would have rejoiced to behold him topple over, and mark what would follow; but it

was an event she could not but own was little likely to happen with one so unconscious and unassuming.

In amends possibly for his earlier uncharitable feelings toward the two ladies, he had, as we know, yielded at once to Lady Julia a very real affection, and to Lady Caroline a more dubious good-will, but he had not the slightest desire to find himself upon the pedestal to which they had simultaneously exalted him; and it intensified Rosamund's sense of Gilbert's wrongs more than anything else could have done, that while the one did not hold up so much as his little finger to maintain himself in his high position, all the efforts put forth by the latter to procure Lady Caroline's bare toleration, only served to plunge him deeper and deeper in the slough of her ill-will.

Matters stood thus when all eyes were opened by Rosamund's burst of tears.

All eyes were opened, including Rosamund's own. She had been altogether unaware of having felt so much: vexatious wounded feeling, and a smoldering sense of injustice on his behalf, had all been working secretly for the absent and oppressed during some weeks past; but had it not been for this new attack upon him, called forth by his very harmless and respectful offer of hospitality, it is probable that all might have gone on as before, for some time longer at any rate.

The principal point now in Lady Caroline's mind was, what did Hartland say to it? She could control her daughter, and extinguish Gilbert; but if Hartland were to look on Rosamund's folly in a serious light, who could estimate the damage it would do her?

As it happened, Hartland himself gave his cousin the benefit of his opinion within a few days; but it is difficult to tell whether Lady Caroline would have been more relieved or mortified had she played eaves-dropper on the occasion.

The two met in the shrubbery, and there was no escape for either, when, between the giant laurel

hedges, hard, close-clipped, and unyielding, they found themselves face to face. He had been at the farm, she had just come down from the house, and both were bound for the lower garden ; yet perhaps they would sooner have given up their several errands there, rather than have had to do them in company.

There was, however, no help for it.

"I was desired to remind Netley about the geranium-cuttings," said Hartland, explaining his presence. "Are you coming to the garden?"

She had her basket and scissors on her arm, and could not deny it. The morning was lovely, and she was going to cut some late roses for the drawing-room. They walked on together, and he opened a gate for her ; then, with a sudden resolution to get over an awkwardness, took the bull by the horns as soon as he had again fastened the latch. "I think you are right to stand up for the absent, Rosamund. There is no need to be ashamed of—of—having been a little excited, you know, the other day. I dare say they have been telling you it is bad form, and all that—but never you mind. There was no harm in it at all."

"It was all true what I said," murmured she.

"I dare say it was, and it was very plucky of you to say it."

"Mamma is so angry with me."

"Is she?"

"Oh, Hartland, you do not know ; you have no idea. Mamma is so fond of you, that your only being by makes her gentler and kinder, at least less unkind to those she hates," cried the young girl, suddenly overflowing with her wrongs again. "I could not help it the other day. I really could not, though it was so silly of me, and though, of course, it was not Major Gilbert I cared about, not *one bit*."

"Of course not."

"It was the whole thing. And it has gone on so long, almost ever since he came here. If mamma

does not take to any one at the outset, she sees nothing good, or kind, or pleasant in them. You can not think how dreadful it is to have a—a friend come in to the room all unsuspecting, and thinking you will be glad to see him ; and perhaps he has taken a great deal of trouble, and worked hard to be able to get away, and does not mean to make a mere call, but to stay a little,—and then he is never asked to stay, and hardly allowed to sit down ! It is—it does—I can not bear it sometimes. But it is not Major Gilbert I am thinking of ; at least, there are—others too," she added anxiously, and stole a glance at her companion.

"Oh, of course ; you don't like to do any one a shabby turn," replied Hartland, with cheerful unconsciousness ; " And I have no doubt Lady Caroline has not thought it out as you have—that's all. She finds afternoon visitors a bore."

"But is it not very wrong, and very unjust, to pronounce upon—upon people of whom you know nothing, just because they like afternoon visiting ?"

Hartland laughed. He did not wish to give an opinion.

"I know I ought not to speak so of mamma," sighed Rosamund ; "but—"

She stopped.

"Well, no. I suppose not. I think I shouldn't, if I were you."

"I often try not to do it ; but—"

Another sigh.

"Try again ; there's no harm in trying."

"But—"

"Well ?"

"I never succeed."

She was burning to pour forth afresh, to inflame the passionless young man with fuel from her own fire, to get him on her side in the struggle ; but insensibly she was herself feeling the influence of his moderation.

"*I know you like mamma,*" she said, slowly.

"Certainly I do."

And who could have helped laughing? For in Rosamund's tone there was an unmistakable suggestion of "Strange as it may seem." Lady Caroline being her mother, she loved her mother, of course; but that any one who *had* not to love should be able to like, was curious.

Her companion, however, laughed good-humoredly, not as if there were anything very particular to laugh at; and she had no fears of having amused him too much. "Certainly I do," he said, with promptitude, and a happy ignorance that there were not a dozen people in the world who could have said as much. "But, look here, Rosamund; here's a piece of profound wisdom for you, profit or not by it as you think fit: even if I did not like Lady Caroline, supposing I had to live with her, I should be at pains to live peaceably with her; and if I were her son, or her daughter—"

"You would not have spoken to her as I did the other day?"

That was it. She had hit the mark. No one could have done the fraternal part better; and who would have dreamed that within his breast a traitor voice was saying loudly, "Yet I could almost love you for it, Rosamund? Rosamund, Rosamund, had I been the defended absent one, I could *quite* have loved you for those very rebel words!"

"We are not to go to the luncheon-party," announced she, presently.

"That's a matter of course."

"I don't know how mamma wrote, or what excuse she gave; but he, Major Gilbert, has not been here since."

"His absence has nothing to do with any offense taken, however," said Hartland. "I can relieve your mind about that. I hear he is gone off for two or three days; and he was away when that invitation was sent."

"Was he? I did wonder that he did not bring it
 lf. It was only sent by two of the men, you
 I thought something must have kept him back
 lay."

"Oh yes; he had gone on leave for a day or two,"
 Hartland, smiling to himself at her innocent reve-
 . "I could have told you at the time, if I had
 n you expected him."

"Oh—hardly 'expected.'"

"You thought he would have looked in for a game
 n-tennis?" (For the new game—yclept lawn-
 s—familiar now to all, was just beginning to
 nfantile hold in England at that time.)

"Yes."
 He had left the night before. I sent that morn-
 ask him to shoot, and my letter was returned."
 "If I had only known that," thought she, bitterly,
 ight have been saved all this. It was thinking
 moment that he might walk in, and find mamma
 ncing him, and all of us listening round, that
 me give way. Why, oh why was I so foolish?
 we might have been going to this delightful
 like everybody else—for I saw mamma was not
 set against it when she first began—if I had but
 ny tongue! And it is not only losing that—it
 at he will think, and how he will mind, and how
 ll feel about it, that I care for. He will never
 how I fought for him; he will only get mamma's
 cold rejection. It *is* hard." And though she
 ot say it even to herself, what she really meant
 "It is hard that while my tears put me to shame
 e all the rest, the only person who might have
 ed by them was not by.")

"Don't you take all this to heart," continued Hart-
 recurring to the main point after a further pause.
 ean about your mother's objection to Gilbert;
 s him no harm, you know," switching off a this-
 ad which obtruded across his path—for invol-
 ily they had wandered on and on, till they had

reached a wild and overgrown region somewhere at the back of the potting-sheds and cucumber and melon frames.

"Do you call it no harm to be slandered and maligned behind your back, and before those Waterfield girls too?"

"They know Gilbert for themselves. Your mother's opinion cannot affect them."

"Why, of course it can," exclaimed Rosamund, who, brought up under the shadow of Lady Caroline, could not but feel surprised to think that any one should not be oppressed by its weight. "Mamma's good word is thought so much of that every one is anxious to get it; and the Waterfields go by mamma in everything. I know they were pleased with Major Gilbert at the first, but lately I have seen them growing stiffer and stiffer to him; and now, after what mamma said on Wednesday, they will have gone home and told every one there that he is—"

"What?"

"Vulgar," said Rosamund, in a low, sad tone; "and it will have been mamma's doing. She showed she thought him so herself,"—drawing a breath, as though the shameful aspersion might have been supposed to have been beyond even Lady Caroline.

Hartland looked straight in front of him, meriting further confidence.

"Aunt Julia would never have found it out—I mean imagined it," proceeded Rosamund, with unconscious truth. "As long as ever she possibly can, Aunt Julia thinks mamma must be right; and it is only when mamma is too—severe, that the poor little auntie sits by with a disapproving face on. That was the worst of all on Wednesday; she said one or two kind things, but she had not on her disapproving face."

"That meant a great deal."

"It meant that, on the whole, she was on mamma's side. She always thinks mamma goes too far; but I could tell she was with mamma—at least more with

er than with me—and that was, oh yes, a great deal for Aunt Julia."

"She is generally benevolence itself."

"Yes, indeed."

"You never hear her speak evil of any one."

"No."

"And I believe she makes them better by the mere sinking well of them," continued Hartland. "I never see my friends to greater advantage than when they 'pal up' to Aunt Julia. You know what to 'pal up' is, don't you, Rosamund? I think you and I 'pal up' very well when—" he stopped short; he could not well say "when we are let alone."

But Rosamund heard nothing; she was pondering on how to bring him back to Gilbert. Aunt Julia was all very well; but it must be confessed that as a topic the new one was insipid, inferior in flavor to the old, and, eager as she was to return to the latter, she was yet maidenly enough to resist doing so too openly. Over her vehement partisanship, she would still throw the semblance of a purely general sentiment.

Bashfulness, delicacy, or indifference—some sentiment or other must have held Hartland back at the same time, for he also let Aunt Julia drop, and hesitated before reverting to the subject which had previously occupied both their thoughts.

Conversation was thus at a momentary standstill, when, on a sudden, a loud "Halloo!" rang through the fragrant air, causing both to turn their heads and halt on the instant.

It must be reserved for another chapter to tell whom they saw advancing swiftly through the young plantations.

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CHAPTER XI.

"IN YOUR PLACE I SHOULD NOT HAVE PRESUMED."

"I would not have you invade each place,
Nor thrust yourself on all societies,
Till men's affections, or your own desert,
Should worthily invite you to your rank."

—BEN JONSON.

OF course it was Gilbert.

"Talk of the —," said Hartland, with a glance of guilt at his companion; and leaving her to apply the quotation or not as she chose, he stepped forward, shook his stick in welcome, and hallooed response.

Neither he nor Rosamund looked at all disturbed. Of the three, Gilbert was the only one who showed himself in any way put out or uneasy. He did not know whether he were not interrupting; he would have liked to be sure that the cousins did not feel caught in spite of their coolness; and satisfied as he had hitherto been on the point, like a true soldier he was always ready to allow that he might be taken in the flank. Lord Hartland, although he had never yet shown himself a rival, might for all that be stealing a march in the dark. He shot a scrutinizing glance and twisted his mustache as he approached the pair.

"I thought it very likely that I should meet some one," he observed, shaking hands; "my only hope was that it might be some one who would not have me up for trespassing; it would have been rather appalling to have been set upon by all your gardeners, as bundled over the hedge"; and he tried to laugh easily. "The fact is, I came up the side path, by which you were once good enough to show me out,"—to Rosamund.

She colored, and Hartland understood. It was a pleasant memory, and both liked to recall it.

("But being shown out is a different thing from showing one's self in," commented the third person internally. "I should not have presumed, had I been in your place, Major Gilbert.")

No one, however, asked for his opinion. Frank approval only beamed from Rosamund's sparkling eyes; and if the idea that her lover had been presumptuous did cross her mind, it was only to thank her good fortune that she and no one else had stumbled across him in the act.

"I had no very clear idea of my whereabouts," continued Gilbert; "but I made sure, from the smoke arising, that I was near the vineries, and supposed there would be an entrance not far off. It cuts off a long round, coming through the woods. I walked over. I did not bring the trap, as I was in hopes Lady Caroline might ask me to stop for luncheon, and we could have our very last match at lawn-tennis for this season, afterward. Do you think she will? Shall I have to beg it very humbly? I'll say anything, you know."

"Yes. Oh, I am sure," murmured Rosamund, with a troubled look that went to her cousin's heart in spite of his diversion at the ludicrous dilemma thus opened. "I think—I am sure—that is—"

("That is, if you would go round by the front door, and keep quiet about this side path, and meeting us, and lawn-tennis, and everything you ought not to mention," was what she wanted to say,—but how make this understood?)

"I am sure mamma is—at home," continued the speaker hurriedly; "and though we have taken in our nets, as the weather has been so bad lately, they can be put up again in half a minute. I will tell the men on our way back."

"Just the day for a game, isn't it?" said Gilbert, looking round. "What a lot of glass you have here!

It must require a tidy lot of men to keep it all in working order. A fine show of grapes too," peering in, as he passed a house. "The door is locked, I'll wager," trying the handle. "That's always the way. They never let you touch one on the vine. At my father's I always make 'em bring the key—"

"We have forgotten the roses, Hartland," said Rosamund, suddenly stopping short.

"And the geranium-cuttings," added he.

"Roses? Geranium-cuttings?" interrogated Gilbert.

"I came down on purpose to gather some of the late roses for mamma, and Hartland had commands for geranium-cuttings for Aunt Julia," said Rosamund, laughing; "and here we have never once thought of either, and it is too late to go now. We are bad messengers, Hartland."

"You had forgotten all about them?" demanded the new-comer, as though struck by the idea. "Were you going for them, by any chance, when you met me?"

That, he thought, might reasonably account for forgetfulness on her part, if not on Hartland's. But to his dismay, it did not appear that his appearance on the scene had had anything to do with it.

"We—where were we going, Hartland?" said Rosamund.

Hartland knew as little as she. He looked at her, looked about him, and confessed his ignorance.

"Lord!" ejaculated Gilbert with an angry laugh, for he did not like this. "I never heard such a joke in my life. Not know where you are going? Lord! It is as well that neither of you is in her Majesty's service, that's all I have to say. Come then, Miss Rosamund, let me help you to get the roses—"

"Oh no, it is too late."

"Too late? Not at all. It is only—"

"Luncheon-time, by my internal clock," said Hartland, divining her feelings. "So I am off, whoever

else stays. Geranium-cuttings must bide their time. Good-by, Rosamund."

("Off, is he," thought Gilbert. "I did him wrong then. But if so, why in the name of wonder did he look so plaguey odd? Be hanged if I didn't think for more than a minute that there was something between them!")

He could not, however, think it longer.

"Oh, don't go, Hartland, pray, *pray* don't go," cried Rosamund, so frankly, so imploringly, nay, so despairingly, that no girl could so have spoken to a possible lover. "You must come in with us—with me—indeed, indeed you must," she continued, catching hold of his arm; then with a sudden recollection, "I must tell you, Major Gilbert, that mamma and I had a little difference this morning,—lately,—and—and, if Hartland would come back with me, he is such a favorite with mamma—"

"Lord! yes, we all know that," cried Gilbert, sticking out his chin, as was his wont when more than ordinarily self-assertive. "We can all see *that* with half an eye."

"Please do, Hartland; please do come," whispered the fair petitioner, still holding him fast, as though fearing that at any moment he would slip from her grasp. "You know," in a lower aside; "you know how it will be if you do not."

"Oh, I'll come if you like, Rosamund. I say, do you not think I had better take Major Gilbert round by the stable-yard, and show him your pony's foot? He will judge whether we are treating it properly. If you go in by the terrace we will follow directly, and perhaps—ahem!—perhaps you had better just tell your mother—she might like to know that I am bringing Major Gilbert in to luncheon."

Bringing Gilbert? If it were not the truth to a hair's-breadth, it was at least a kindly intentioned and adroit adaptation of it to the necessity of the moment—and well did the giver of the message comprehend

all that it would accomplish. With Lady Caroline such a mantle of protection would cover even Gilbert's sins.

Further protection and relief was also in store. In the drawing-room sat Amy and Violet Waterfield, who had come to invite her to the Grange, but who, instead, had been themselves detained by Lady Caroline, who by some means or other had known Hartland was about, and suspected he had fallen in with his cousin. "Even yet she may be saved if we can but keep her from ever meeting that odious man again," she had thought in allusion to Gilbert, and had pressed the Waterfield girls to stay. In her heart, moreover, she knew that she was afraid of her daughter, afraid of irritating her further, unwilling to stir the smoldering embers. There had been something of an explanation between the two stubborn, self-willed women behind the scenes, and Rosamund had been sufficiently humbled to profess a vague regret for having "forgotten herself" in public, while Lady Caroline had gone so far as to allow that she might also have said a little more than she had intended on the other hand,—and each had carefully kept aloof from the subject thereafter. The company of others was in consequence rather welcome than otherwise even to the unsociable mistress of the mansion, and she was talking with a fair show of amiability to her young visitors, when her daughter entered with Hartland's message, followed almost immediately by Hartland himself. Gilbert was behind him.

Lady Caroline's feelings may be imagined ; we may therefore turn to those of the love-sick major.

He was in luck, he thought ; he had not to encounter the frigid back in the blue gown all by himself. The gown was there, it is true, but other gowns were there also ; and after quitting Lady Caroline's cold fingers, he could clasp nimbly two other hands, which, if they did not respond to his pressure, at least did not feel like dead fish in his own.

To say that the Waterfields did not recognize the value of their position at the moment would be to do them injustice ; they were neither clever nor brilliant, nor by any means humorous young ladies, but they did see the fun of this. Gilbert, as he looked gratefully into one gentle and seemingly unconscious face after the other, thinking, "Ay, ay, you are the right sort of tip for me, with your stupid good-nature ; you will neither see anything nor tell it again," would have dropped down in amazement had he beheld what was in their minds. "No, no ; they are no count," he decided, "and they will serve to amuse the other fellow by-and-by ; so once we are out of the way of old Bluegown"—and even in the old Bluegown's presence the handsome soldier looked jubilantly round.

"Everybody is about this jolly fine morning," he observed ; "the road is full of carriages and gigs. I met lots of people tooling about."

The same observation, differently expressed, had gone the round, it may be remembered, on the previous Wednesday, and if anything had been wanting to recall the meeting of that day, it would have been this opening remark.

"It was too fine not to tempt us out," replied Violet Waterfield, as no one else spoke. "Lady Caroline, you are never idle ; you never put by your work for a morning ramble."

"Correspondence accumulates so rapidly, that I have been at my desk ever since breakfast, Violet, because I had to leave it yesterday."

"You were in town yesterday ?"

"I ran up for the day, yes."

("Dash it ! if I had known !" reflected Gilbert.)

"We saw you at the station," said Miss Waterfield ; "and knowing you as we do, we ought to have recollected you would be especially busy to-day in consequence. But you see, even if we had left you in peace, here would have been Lord Hartland."

"Failing me, Major Gilbert," said Hartland; and the general smile a little faded.

"I am always happy to see my friends," affirmed Lady Caroline, with ever so slight an emphasis on the last word; "but now that I have a grown-up daughter, she must help to entertain them, and—there is the gong!—now, Violet, now, Amy; Hartland, I want to speak to you about the new farm-buildings"; and she fell back to keep pace with him, but swept past Gilbert, who officiously whirled a basket-chair out of her path, as though he had been the footman. She had never once addressed him since his entrance.

Luncheon at King's Common was something of a function.

Lady Caroline liked solemnity, state, and silver covers; Mr. Liscard liked, for dyspeptic reasons, to make the meal his early dinner. Both were fairly early risers and brain-workers after their own fashion, consequently both had good appetites, and made the most of them.

"You can always count on a rattling good lunch there," Gilbert had informed his sisters, he having more than once made good his resolve to stay for it. "Whether any one is expected or not, it is always the same—lots of good things."

Up and down the table there would be a variety of nice hot dishes, curry, cutlets, pork griskins, lamb's fry, and the like; savory but hideously indigestible viands, as every one but Mr. Liscard allowed, and as he better than any one else knew. Still, he would have them, liked them, ate them, and suffered for them; and nothing annoyed him more than to be begged to confine himself to the plain joint.

The plain joint would be there, one at each end of the table, presently to disappear to the servants' hall; and there would further be a goodly array of roast and boiled cold meats, raised pies, and stout cut-and-come-again game jellies on the sideboard.

No little silver mugs nor high perch chairs were

visible, however. No round, rosy faces, surmounting clean pinafores, beamed expectantly up and down the board. The children in their distant school-room were invisible and inaudible, and never had the luckless Gilbert more regretted their absence than on the present occasion.

He was fond of children—the more the merrier, and the noisier the better. Had the little troop, known to be not far off, now filed in, he would have fitted them into their seats, tied on their feeders, cut up their portions, and with jest and chaff have got through the meal hilariously. Every minute he would have found something fresh to say, something funny, wherewith to elicit the shy chuckle or saucy rejoinder—added to which, a series of pleasing feats connected with oranges, forks, and table-napkins, would have made him the center for every young one's eye, and the momentary idol of their imagination.

But here, as usual, he was balked by Lady Caroline's austere rules. A man can hardly attitudinize with an orange, and catch it on a lively fork, for the benefit of grown-up people, sitting solemnly round, conversing in serious, ceremonious tones—people content to be dull, and without either desire to be or intention of being otherwise; and although the ill-starred major did finally create a diversion which suspended for a full minute the murmuring of undertones and the noiseless circling round of the servants, it was by an involuntary and not altogether successful performance.

His neighbor asked for water,—asked a footman, not him,—but seeing a bottle near, and anxious to be attentive, he stretched forward to reach it, and upset his claret-glass. A claret-glass just filled contains a fair amount of wine, and Gilbert's plate was the receptacle for nearly two-thirds of the ruby liquid.

Tablecloth and napkin had their share, however, and his own coat-sleeve did not escape. The mess was a complete one.

Had Hartland done it, had any one else at table

done it, nobody, not even Lady Caroline, would have cared two straws; it was hard that such a thing should have happened to the only person present whom it could render uncomfortable.

For the moment Gilbert's courage failed him; he looked piteously round, and for the first time in his life had neither apology nor laugh at command.

It took but a few minutes ere plate and glass had been removed, clean damask spread over the soiled, sleeve wiped, and the misdemeanant, rather red in the face, started upon a fresh supply of roast mutton; but in that brief interval he had almost lost all appetite.

The time had seemed long, and no one had done anything to shorten it.

Rosamund was far from him, and while writhing beneath the rigid unconsciousness of a hostess whose marble visage absolutely ignored the accident, its effects, and the subsequent restoration to order, he had not met a single eye of sympathy.

Had he not been so very hungry he could not have allowed another plate to be set before him. But he had only just begun, and the mutton was excellent. He could not decline it, nor the late peas, and tomatoes, and succulent French beans, of all which he had before laid in an untasted supply, and to which it did seem cruel that he should have again to help himself beneath Lady Caroline's very nose. The result was that he ate more inelegantly than ever in his haste to catch up with the rest of the party, and fright lest he should at any moment find himself plying knife and fork alone.

The hurry was needless. Hartland sent for some more cold beef.

"Are you going to do great things at the flower-show, Lady Caroline?" he inquired, at the same time.

"I am afraid not, Hartland. Netley tells me he has nothing worth showing this year."

"Nothing worth showing!" exclaimed Gilbert, thinking he saw an opportunity. "In your beautiful

garden ! Well, if he has nothing worth showing, he has plenty worth looking at, that's all I can say."

"The flowers for competition are not the same as those ordinarily put out in the garden," observed Lady Caroline coldly,—but still it was something to have won so much. Her garden was a weak point.

"No one hereabouts can compete with you, I suppose ?"

"Oh dear, yes." Not that she thought for a moment any one could, but the rejoinder could contain an inflection of "Much you know about it" which could not be let pass.

"The gardeners nowadays are such awful swells," proceeded Gilbert, turning for relief to Amy Waterfield. "A gardener is like a doctor—or a painter—he'll grow his one thing, his specialty, and he'll do nothing else. Have you ever noticed—" and then just as he fancied he was getting to lean back in his chair and be a little mildly entertaining, and show that he was quite at home and at his ease, he found himself upon his feet, every one else the same, and the ladies about to leave the room. The meal was over, but he could hardly be said to have shone at it.

Now, however, things must inevitably brighten.

Mr. Liscard, who liked his cigarette after luncheon, was approachable, if nothing else ; and though he invariably talked over Gilbert's head and assumed his acquaintance with the most recondite authors, of whose very existence the unfortunate soldier had hitherto been ignorant, yet it was something to be talked to at all.

"If I could only come up now to the scratch," thought he, as Hartland rose to go home and get himself into flannels for the proposed lawn-tennis, "if I could just get it out now"; but on the whole he decided to wait.

"Curious that idea of Kant about his digestion," began the scholar, crossing his knees placidly and opening the conversation with as familiar an intona-

tion as if he had said Bobby or Jack ; rather more so, indeed, since the internal organs of the latter couple were not interesting to him as a parent.

"Indeed?" ("Who the plague was Kant?" demanded Gilbert of himself. "I know the name of course, but—well, all I can do is to lie low, and wait for a lead.") "And so he had a queer digestion, did you say?" he continued, interrogatively.

"Or he thought he had, and took all sorts of fancies into his head to remedy it. Never read his life?"

"N—no, no ; I can't say I have. I—we military men don't have much time for reading you see. I'm afraid books are not much in our line."

"True. You leave them to us," replied Mr. Liscard, feeling complimented, in a vague, delicate fashion, by the apologetic air with which the avowal was made. "And between ourselves, Kant is deep, certainly deep. His 'Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals,' for instance."

"His *what?*" ejaculated Gilbert, both eyes opening.

"His 'Theory of Ethics,' likewise," proceeded Mr. Liscard, as though unconscious of the effect produced,—"both are undeniably tough. Fine, but profound. It does not do to touch them on the surface. I have him all in there," with a wave of his hand toward the library, "and I look forward to studying him thoroughly in my first leisure time ; but at present I must confess," with a glance toward his companion, for he wondered how much of the confession Gilbert would comprehend, "I must own I have contented myself with the memoir. The memoir is exceedingly interesting : especially in the account it gives of the quaint old fellow's habits and mode of life. He only ate one meal a day, you know."

"Really? But surely that was—was"—(now what was it? cogitated the speaker, internally. "What am I to say it was? A good or bad notion? Sensible, or the reverse? If the old gentleman would

only look a little less like a sphinx, and give me *some* sort of idea of what he wants me to say, I should say it like a shot. But when all he does is to look at me like that—however, here goes.") "That was a strange thing to do, certainly," he observed, with wise reticence.

"He made the most of it, however," rejoined the other, well satisfied to be so excellently listened to, and not sorry in his heart to perceive that little as he really knew, and poorly as he would have shone had he been among sages, he could fearlessly prattle in his present company. "We are told that he often sat over this solitary meal for three or four hours—"

"Bless my soul!"

"He did indeed, during which his conversation is said to have been most brilliant. I own, however, that this I, for one, can hardly reconcile with his other whim, concerning the digestion—"

— "Oh, ah!—yes—the digestion. What was it about the digestion? You were just going to tell me."

"Considering it undesirable for the brain and stomach to be working at the same time, he always preferred to walk alone after dinner, for fear of being tempted to talk. He went so far as to consider it a bad thing even to open his mouth," continued Mr. Liscard solemnly.

"Good gracious!"

"This, however, it seems, was only in later life."

"Well, I should hope so."

"And it is in curious contradiction of another German philosopher's ideas on the same subject."

"Is it, indeed?"

"The one—but upon my word, I forget who it was,—dear me, how stupid I am! Why, I know his name as well as my own, and yet it has escaped me at this moment,"—bending his brows in cogitation.

"Now, what can his name be?"

"Perhaps if you will recall the—the anecdote," hinted Gilbert.

"Yes ; well, I can do that. And you may be able to help me to recollect—though how I ever came to forget—however, this is the story. One of these thinking men—these whimsical students, full of fancies—took it into his sage head that cold air—the colder the better—was a famous tonic for the inside. It may be—I don't pretend to know ; but one thing I am very sure of, I don't intend to chance it, at least in his way. His way was this. Directly he had swallowed his food, instead of sitting quiet, smoking and chatting, as we are doing now, he would dart out-of-doors and race up and down like a steam-engine—against the wind—if there were any—mouth wide open, gulping it down wholesale, as if he were filling an air-cushion. Peculiar that, eh ?"

"Very," assented Gilbert,—and the sudden speculation as to what would be Lady Caroline's sensations should he appear in front of her ladyship's windows, running open-mouthed against the wind, with a view to swallowing cold air, caused him to laugh in spite of himself.

Mr. Liscard, who never laughed, was nevertheless content to have been amusing.

"Cicero used to lie down flat upon his stomach," continued he after a few puffs.

"And the fellow who devoured oysters and figs by the ton, I should like to know what remedy he adopted ?" said Gilbert. "Worth knowing, that. To be able to lay in such a cargo every day without damaging the concern must be fine."

"Of whom are you thinking, I wonder ?"

"Of an emperor—a Roman emperor—but be hanged if I know which. I am not up in them, I own. But this fellow was a notorious glutton—"

—"The epithet would apply—ahem !—pretty generally," and Mr. Liscard smiled approvingly, for the conversation was quite to his mind, and he did not find his companion more ignorant than many others. "I suspect you mean Tertullus. If anything, he ex-

ceeded the others in the proportions of his appetite. Yes, it certainly is amazing what an amount can be consumed by a single individual, given time and appetite. Time is the chief thing. That is the principal reason why the French have such a greater capacity for taking in supplies at once, and also for digesting them afterward, than we have ; they sit a long time at table, and allow a reasonable time to elapse between each course. Here we hurry and scramble. I tell Lady Caroline every day I wish the servants would not sweep my plate out of sight the moment I have finished, and have something else at my elbow before I know that it is gone. Servants are all alike, you may do what you will. Literally, I have sometimes to hold on to my plate while I am talking, or else it will have vanished before I have done saying what I have to say ! "

" Hard lines, indeed."

" And afterward one should sit peacefully awhile ; not bolt off as Lord Hartland has done, directly the food is down."

" You like to sit still for a bit ? " said Gilbert, concealing the chagrin he dared not show, for he was himself now eager to be off, and not having eaten nor drunk enough to require inactivity such as his host advocated, thought the worthy gentleman might very well have now made a move.

At all events he might have permitted him to do so.

But a companion was just what suited Mr. Liscard at this hour.

" I do not consider reading can be good," proceeded he ponderously, " unless the book be the very lightest of novels, and of those I, personally, am not fond. Solid reading is certainly to be avoided. Sleep, they tell me, is not to be recommended ; and exertion of any kind, it goes without saying, must be injurious. In fact, all medical men, I believe, are agreed in considering easy conversation as the desideratum. Easy

conversation," lifting his glass to his lips, "without any exciting ingredients."

"Such as a proposal," reflected Gilbert. "Well, another time will do for me, old gentleman; and if easy conversation means another bumper of this very respectable liquor," and he helped himself with an air of satisfaction not unpleasing to a host in the proper humor for it.

"What tortures poor Carlyle endured!" It appeared that the topic was not exhausted, as one of the pair had half hoped it might have been.

"I suppose so. His health was—was very bad, I suppose." He could certainly cope better with Carlyle than with Kant, but would have to be prudent even with the sage of Chelsea.

"Chronic dyspepsia. Foolish habits; no exercise; and probably a wretched cook."

"People are such fools about exercise," observed Gilbert, who at last knew something of what he was talking about. "I am sure I don't understand how they get on at all without it. I could never do without my three or four hours a day of walking, or riding, or fencing—it don't matter what: keep the muscles going, say I; and when I have had my five miles' row up-stream, and a tub and a change after it, I am fit for anything."

"So I should imagine. You are young and strong. When you are my age you won't want to row five miles either up or down stream; but I can still walk my four or five along the road, and that is something, when formed into a regular habit. The regularity is the great thing. Many people will saunter about the doors for six days in the week, and take a great burst on the seventh, just as if that would do them any sort of good. It is taking every day a little, and a little, and a little; but I need not speak to you—you are an active man and know what I mean."

"Well, yes, that's just what I am, Mr. Liscard." Health was Gilbert's hobby as well as his host's, and

he piqued himself on the sturdiness with which he flourished the dumb-bells every morning. "No, indeed, I keep 'em all pretty brisk down at the barracks, I can tell you. Most of us go in for something. I encourage games and competitions and gymnastics, you know ; they do a lot of good if they only keep the youngsters out of mischief. We are getting up a cricket-match with the townfolks next week. I don't go in for cricket as much as I did ; a man has no business with cricket at five-and-thirty, but, hang it all ! I can handle the willow yet when I'm wanted. I tell them they have always me to fall back upon ; and somehow or other it invariably seems they *do* have to fall back on me. We have an excellent fives court too ; and some of us are racket men. Rackets is about as good a game as any going, to my mind. But after all, lawn-tennis is my game now ; there is an open-air, cheery feeling about it, on a fine, bright summer day, that is equaled by nothing but the ring of the ice on a frosty December afternoon, when you have your skates on for the first skate of the season."

To all of this Mr. Liscard listened with a certain appreciation. It was impossible not to be in a measure carried away by the overflowing vitality of the speaker, to note the clear eye and ruddy cheek, the broad chest and straight back, and to feel that these offered themselves, as it were, as samples of the sentiments above expressed.

No fault could be found with the samples. Gilbert was an excellent specimen of his code : and of the code itself he nodded his approval.

Personally he did not find the glib soldier jar upon his sensibilities, and he knew enough of the world to perceive that, gentleman or not, the man was probably a better man, more respectable, more to be respected, than the majority of those who came to his house.

He had already heard Major Gilbert spoken of as a first-rate military man, likely to rise in the service ;

and also as a sensible fellow under whom a subaltern did well to be placed ; he really did not see why he should be so persistently pooh-poohed by Lady Caroline.

He had been informed by her ladyship of what she termed the absurd pretensions of an impossible suitor ; but, left to himself, he should not in honesty have seen, nor did he now see, the impossible part of the position.

He had twelve children. Twelve children might grow to be twelve burdens. It was worth while inquiring into whom and what this Major Gilbert was.

If it should turn out that he could maintain a wife suitably (and there was no reason to suppose he could not), what was there to prevent the match ?

Rosamund was for it, he supposed. If she had not been, the impatience and fretfulness of his wife over the subject was unaccountable, since he knew Lady Caroline well enough to be tolerably sure she would not have bestirred herself to worry about a lover whose rejection was resolved upon.

So then his daughter fancied Gilbert ? He would think the matter over.

Our readers will remember that, subject to conjugal sway as the submissive husband ordinarily was, there were occasions when he could prove as unmanageable as anybody, and the present seemed to offer as favorable an opportunity for being so as he could ever hope to have.

Even alone and single-handed he had now and again settled her ladyship in a way that had told for some time afterward ; so that at this juncture, with an ally dauntless and determined as Lady Caroline herself, was he likely to quail ?

Not he. Rosamund needed not to have feared for him.

CHAPTER XII.

GILBERT IN A NEW LIGHT.

"The fire i' the flint
Shows not till it be struck."

—*Timon of Athens.*

GILBERT on the lawn-tennis ground was perhaps rather worse than Gilbert anywhere else.

It was, as he said, his great game. It was, moreover, his chiefest opportunity; for although sea-songs, with a rattling bass accompaniment, and round dances to the strains of his own band, were neither of them to be despised as occasions for showing to advantage, they were as nothing compared to the smooth grass on which he could dart and swoop, twist and screw, shout directions to his partner, chaff his opponents, cringe with eagle eye before the swift-coming ball, and send it back with the smash which won the stroke.

Even when not actively engaged, the discussing, arranging, marching to and fro in his pretty striped cap and jacket, measuring the net, and tightening, or loosening it as required—anything and everything connected with the sport was delightful to him—and his mere walk across the court was an offense to any one not prejudiced in his favor.

Rosamund, however, was resolved to see nothing amiss. She had, at what cost to herself she alone knew, stood to her guns in defense of a maligned and injured man, and that he was what she had affirmed him to be had now become with her a dogma.

Why should he not be merry, talk, jest, and banter? Why should he not back his side to win, and crow loudly over the victory she also shared? Why should

those ridiculous prudes of Waterfields be so clearly, palpably, chillingly unresponsive, and even Hartland seem quieter than usual?

Provoked and irritated on every side, she affected spirits she hardly felt; and there was now and then a sting in her gay rallying of the others, which all but Gilbert understood only too well. Already she was ranging herself to do battle by his side.

Toward him she was inexpressibly, anxiously kind; his wishes were anticipated, and his wants provided for, almost ere he knew them himself; he was looked to for counsel, for applause, or for sympathy—and handed his balls when it was his turn for serving.

Their adversaries, Lord Hartland and Amy, were no match for them; Rosamund could give points to any one of the Waterfield girls, and Hartland had never taken particular pains to be a player: ere he had returned to England the game had taken hold, and he had felt himself behind the rest of the world at it. Almost from the first, therefore, the victory in every set was a foregone conclusion, and every one knew why a change of partners was not resorted to.

"*You* ought to be over there, of course," said Gilbert aside to Rosamund, "and I wonder your cousin does not propose it; but as he is content, I for one shall make no such suggestion."

"You think we are too strong for them?"

"To be sure we are. You can see it for yourself. If I ever miss a stroke, you are safe to pound it over from behind,—I can not help laughing when I see it fly over my head; we seem as if we must carry all before us, you and I."

She felt what he meant, and to a look and tone so full of significance there could be no answer.

Play was resumed.

Then Lady Caroline came out on the lawn. For a time she had left the young people without supervision, aware that there could not be many openings for sentiment in a vigorous four-handed match at

lawn-tennis ; but now it occurred to her to see what was going on.

"Who arranged the partners?" forthwith was demanded of Violet Waterfield, who was sitting out.

"I think they took shape of themselves, Lady Caroline. Amy is better than I, so we made her play against Rosamund."

This was not what was meant, as the speaker very well knew, but it was an answer of some kind ; it stopped the question trembling on her august companion's lips, and made it impossible for her to pursue her inquiries,—since the only one she wished to make was, why is Lord Hartland playing with your sister, and not with my daughter? Had she known anything of the game, it would have been of course easy to demand why the two weaker should be put in against the two stronger,—but she was ignorant of everything about lawn-tennis.

Games of all kinds were her abhorrence, and it was only because, as she said, people would play them, that she had at last given in and had a ground made, to prevent King's Common being the only place left in England without one.

Could she have had her will, the innovation would never have found its way into her solemn, funereal assemblies. She had always had her annual garden-party ; her great tent on the lawn, wherein a band performed select pieces, and her other great tent wherein were stately refreshments and rather weak claret and champagne cups ; and she had thought that everything went off well, and that all were pleased and honored by her condescension, if she received now and again the conventional murmur of "a delightful afternoon" from a guest more habituated to falsehood than the rest.

Her parties as a fact had been generally detested, until Rosamund by perseverance and resolution had effected *something* of a change.

They could not go on as they were doing, the

youthful revolutionist had declared. Their stale old teas, that had been getting ever staler for the past half-century, would make them the laughing-stock of the neighborhood. Hartland had wondered why they did not have a variety.

She had found out the magic key, the minx. Hartland's name, artfully introduced, was almost sure to carry the day, once Lady Caroline were wavering; and to be told point-blank to her face that she was old-fashioned and ridiculous, which it must be owned Rosamund on one occasion actually did tell her, was enough to make any one waver.

The fact was, Greek had met Greek, when Lady Caroline Liscard brought out her eldest daughter. Rosamund, capable of passionate affections, of any amount of self-sacrifice, of every generous and noble emotion, was not to be ruled by an iron hand. Her spirit simply rose beneath dictation; and authority, even lawful authority, when it carried neither reason nor justice with it, could not frighten her. Had she loved her mother, loved, honored, and believed in her, a silken thread would have been a chain to bind her in submission absolute; but alas! she had learned, she knew not how, to distrust, nay, more, to despise,—and the result was that, when her blood was up, no words were too sharp nor too cruel for her ready tongue.

No wonder that Lady Caroline at times astonished the gentle Julia by the alacrity with which she adapted herself to a new suggestion. She was fain not to have it seen by the world that it had not emanated from herself in the first instance.

She now seated herself beneath the elms gloomily. Her sky was fast clouding over, and she had a presentiment of more evil yet to come; but nevertheless, even she little dreamed that the storm was actually about to burst, and that within the hour its rumble would be heard approaching.

The sun was still high in the heavens, and the

players showing no sign of weariness nor cessation, when, on a sudden, the game seemed to come to a standstill, while all eyes were turned in one direction.

Two or three small country boys could now be seen running toward the lawn as swiftly as their legs could carry them ; and it was their shouting and gesticulations which had caused the sudden suspension of flying balls.

They now came up nearly breathless, shouting, screaming and panting ; and as each spoke or tried to speak, he pointed behind him, and vehemently endeavored to make himself understood. It was plain that an accident, or dilemma, or something of the kind had taken place, for which assistance was urgently demanded ; but it was some minutes before the nature of the help required could be comprehended from the confused statements and entreaties of the excited and incoherent children.

"What in the name of wonder do they say?" cried Gilbert, turning to the others. "I can't make out a word" (the provincial dialect being unfamiliar to him). "What do they say? What is a 'dom'?"

"A dam—the mill-dam," replied Rosamund, her ear distinguishing just so much. "What is it about the mill-dam, Georgie?" quickly. "Has the water broken loose, as it did in the spring?"

"No, miss ; it's not the water—"

"No, miss ; the dom's that deep—"

"It's Billy, miss—"

All three were gasping and spluttering at once. It was impossible to hear.

"Oh, what *do* you say? You, Georgie, speak. Is any one in? Is that what you mean? Be quick," and she almost shook the little boy to hurry him up.

"We went for to fish there, and his foot slipped on the bank—"

"He's holding on by the willow—"

"It's him as is bottom o' your class in Sunday school—"

"There *is* a boy in," cried Rosamund. "Now, boys, quick! tell us where."

"Holding on by the willow, but he can't more than get a catch of it—"

"The willow? What willow?"

"The big willow along of the white gate; but the water's terrible strong."

"Can he swim at all?"

"No, miss," loudly, from the united party.

"Has no one," cried Rosamund shrilly,—“has no one gone yet? Didn't I see you tell those men by the way?” pointing to a couple of gardeners not far off. “Oh! they are going. But why don't they fly? They will never be in time. They—”

“Good God! you may well say so! The lad will be drowned while we stand here talking,” said Gilbert, suddenly. “Here,” catching the biggest of the messengers by the collar, “here, you, show me the way—sharp—scud like the wind now—that's it! Hang the boy! he's done for already. What on earth—well, I must go alone. Hark ye! is it through that gate? Yes. And to the right? Yes. And through the wood? And I come to what: A bridge and a white gate. All right. Come along after me, in case I miss the way,” loosing his hold, and shooting ahead like a rocket. In a few moments he was lost to view.

“A mill-dam is an ugly place for a swim,” quoth Gilbert now to himself. “I wish I could strip as I run; but, any way, it's lucky I'm in my flannels, and perhaps it is as well not to be too soon. I have got to keep my head now. If he has dropped off the willow by this time, I am probably too late—if so, it can't be helped, poor little chap; but if he drops off just as he sees me *there* will be the danger. He would grip me like a wild-cat in the water, unless I keep out of reach till he had lost consciousness. That must be my game. Otherwise it's ‘good-by’ for us both, for I could never keep both him and myself up in a current like this, if he were tearing me down. Ha!

there's the mill—ay, and the bridge, and the gate—now for the willow,” rapidly verifying each successive landmark ; “ the willow—confound the willow ! where is it ? Plague take it ! ” casting a hawk's eye up and down the stream. “ Stop—yes—behind this beech,”—he was up into it in a second. “ Holloa, boy ! Hie, boy, hie ! Ho, ho, ho ! ” But no shout came in answer.

“ Gone, by Jove ! ” muttered Gilbert, kicking off his shoes.

“ There's a pretty swirl in the water, but I could manage it easy enough if I knew where the poor beggar was,” further considered he, hastily letting himself down to the water's edge ; “ if I only knew how long he had been in, and if he had been down more than once, supposing he does come up. Hoy ! ”—with a sudden yell—“ hoy ! there he is ! ” and flashed in himself just as the first among the other runners emerged from the wood at the top of the bank. They could not see the ghastly face, with its terrified, starting eye-balls, which was turned full on Gilbert, as the agonized shriek of the drowning boy rang through the air ; but they could perceive him leap from the bough, and knew that hope was not extinct.

“ That was his first coming up,” concluded Gilbert swiftly. “ He could not have screamed like that the second time, and it is quite possible he may not even rise again. The current's stronger than I thought. I should like—I should *like* to go for him next time, but the risk's too great. It won't do to fool away both our lives. Oh ! I see him—I see him ! You idiots—asses—hold your infernal tongues, can't you ? ” for the poor wretch had enough on his hands without being distracted by volleys of advice and suggestion from the bank. “ Oh ! *do* be quiet, can't you ? ” groaned he internally.

Every nerve was at the fullest tension, eye and ear were on the strain, and he was husbanding his breath and his strength for the life-and-death struggle to

come,—and they thought he did not know what he was about !

He raised one hand, and shook it, and the dumb command was understood. The voices died away, and a breathless, awe-stricken silence ensued ; while a swallow, that had been scared away from the pool before, returned, and skimmed hither and thither athwart the swimmer's anxious vision.

He had, however, but a single minute of such dread suspense.

In far shorter time than it takes to write, the surface of the dark water was again broken by the head and shoulder of the helpless boy, and again a cry, but this time a feeble and almost inaudible one, escaped.

"Now for it," said Gilbert, setting his teeth, and striking out for the spot—for hitherto he had kept as far aloof up-stream as he dared, and had, as the event proved, calculated admirably on the cast of the current in fixing on the place where it would throw up its victim for the second time.

He now made for the opposite bank, a little lower down, and had scarce reached it ere a formless mass, undistinguishable, yet unmistakably him—or *it*—he sought, slowly floated to the surface, within a couple of yards of him.

It was long ere Gilbert could recall without a shudder the touch of a forked bough, which struck him sharply at that moment, and, to his excited imagination, seemed to seize and grip him in its hold.

He had pursued a course of action requiring an amount of resolution and self-restraint beyond the power of most men to put into force. He had held himself in check as only a man accustomed to emergencies and self-control could have done ; and he had faced an awful danger and an awful death with deliberate and therefore double courage.

But the touch of that moss-grown branch sent a

stab to his heart, and his blood ran cold for many a day afterwards when he thought of it.

It needed but a moment, however, to reassure his startled nerves. It was almost instantly obvious that the unconscious object by his side was powerless at last to compass his own and his deliverer's destruction ; and the only fear now entertained by the bold swimmer was lest life itself might be extinct ere medical measures could be taken.

He seized the child by his clothing—a stout shirt—got one arm well round his waist, and with the other struck a few powerful strokes, reached the bank, and was but dimly aware of what next took place.

The strain was over—no more was required of him.

A mouthful of brandy, however, sent down by some one's forethought, and a dozen respirations lying extended on the warm grass, and the brave fellow sat up again, none the worse for it all.

He had been in time, the rescued boy still breathed, and under vigorous rubbing and chafing was giving satisfactory symptoms of returning animation.

"But it was a near thing for the little chap, my lord ; another five minutes, and no one could ha' done nothing for him," observed one of those who had been busiest, but who now gave way to others, and finding himself by Lord Hartland's side, respectfully anticipated his sympathy. "Only one of a thousand could ha' managed as well as that there gentleman did. Golly ! I never see nothing like it. To wait and wait, and hold back, and hang back—there's some of us didn't seem to take in what he was up to ; but, to be sure, we might ha' known he's a doomed man as tries to save the drowning till so be as they're past trying to save themselves."

Hartland assented by a mute movement.

"The water's powerful strong just at this bit," continued the speaker, "and them little rascals, they knows that as well as any one. Many's the time *they've been warned off it, they have.* Says I my-

self to some of them not a week ago, says I, 'You'll wait till some of you's drowned, that's what you'll do, afore you'll leave off meddling with that 'ere dom.' And drowned that boy there, that son of Barley's, would ha' been, sure as fate, but for this gentleman. You see, my lord, none of us can swim."

"Neither can I," said Hartland, in a low voice. The confession was very bitter to him. He could not have told why, but he felt degraded by it.

From the first moment when intelligence had been brought of the accident, he had known that no assistance was to be had from him, except such as he could hardly hope could be of any use; but on the chance he had run for a rope, while Gilbert was hurrying straight to the dam. He had only now arrived, and even his rope had been too late to haul the rescuer and the rescued out of the water. He had not been able to procure one sooner.

With mingled feelings of envy and admiration he now hung over the man who had so unhesitatingly and deliberately risked his life—and who had been able to do it.

("He is a noble fellow. How paltry, how unworthy in the light of this, seems all our prejudice against any slight tricks of manner or of speech! How unutterably trivial his offenses! He hears of a poor yokel's child, as insignificant a human being as can well be imagined, in the jaws of death, and throws himself into the same jaws as readily as he would pluck a daisy. What a head he must have to have kept cool in that horrid place!" glancing with a shiver at the dull, deadly current in the hollow; "one false move, one bit of a bungle, would have lost all—and he knew it. Well," after a pause, "well, if his heart is equal to his head, Rosamund has not chosen ill after all.")

Yet he said it with a sort of sigh.

CHAPTER XIII.

“IS HE A FIT HUSBAND FOR YOUR DAUGHTER,
THEODORE?”

“When a lover offers, madam, to take a daughter without a portion, one should inquire no further: everything is contained in that one article; and ‘without a portion’ supplies the want of youth, beauty, family, wisdom, honor, and honesty.”—‘*L’Avaro*,’ *tr. by* FIELDING.

GILBERT was now the hero of the hour. The place he had so often coveted, and had striven by foolish and ill-advised efforts to obtain, was now unanimously and spontaneously accorded him, and he awoke from a brief trance to find himself the center of an enthusiastic group, brimming over with that honest homage which Englishmen of all classes pay to courage, daring, and success.

Moreover, it was vastly appreciated by those rough worshipers, that not only had the gentleman faced the ugly dam, and the still uglier possibility of being dragged down into its depths, but he had done it all for a poor bit of a Billy Barley, Stephen Barley’s eighth son, who, bless him! could ha’ been spared better than most, and who, for a lad as was always in mischief, and never knowed himself whether he was in or out, beat all the country round.

If anything had happened to the gentleman a-getting out of Billy Barley, it would ha’ been a sore shame; and in their hearts they added, Billy was not worth it.

As things were, however, and as no harm had been done, they were immensely proud and pleased that it had been thought by the gentleman worth his while

to put his own life in jeopardy for that of the insignificant imp; and enough could not be made of him.

Barley himself was shoved and hustled to the front.

"It aint along o' me to have many words, sir," said the poor man, exhibiting a variety of nervous movements; "but there's all here knows as there aren't but few as would ha' done it. I—I don't exactly know what I ought to say, sir."

"Why, you say it uncommonly well, then, my good fellow," replied Gilbert kindly. "Nobody could do it better, I am sure. I am very glad I was in-time. How's the lad now?"

"A-comin' to, sir."

"That's right! Oh, he'll come to, sharp enough, once he has got some breath into him again; but, I say, just take a little care of him for a day or two. He'll not be quite himself till he has got over his ducking."

"He'll not forget it, sir."

"I hope he won't. It is a very good lesson for them all."

"I mean he'll not forget your doing it, sir."

"Oh! that's it? Glad to hear it. Now, then, give me a hand up, will you? I must be moving, and see about some dry clothes."

The grateful fellow almost lifted him in his arms.

"You can't walk yet, Gilbert," said Lord Hartland softly. It was the first time he had ever addressed him without the prefix.

"Oh yes, I'm all right. A little giddy. Give me your arm for a moment. It will go off directly." He passed his hand across his eyes, shook himself, and declared it had passed.

"We can get the dog-cart down in no time, my lord," suggested one of the bystanders, eager to do something. "If the gentleman will take my coat, and sit in the sun, I'll be down again in a few minutes."

"Ay, do. Bring it sharp," answered Gilbert for himself. "And, I say, we'll go up to the bridge if you bring it there. There is no need for any one to stop on here," he continued, looking round. "The boy's all right, I suppose."

"He is talking now, my lord."

"Don't let him talk," said Gilbert quickly. "Keep him quiet. And, I say, carry him home now as fast as you can, and put him to bed, between blankets. If you all keep round him like that, you will have him in a fever to-morrow. Here," to Barley, "you are his father; you take him home, and mind he's kept there. Keep him *warm*, and keep him *quiet*; d'ye understand? Mind it's done, then."

His clear, quick tones, his brevity and conciseness, and, above all, the evident expectation of prompt and unquestioning obedience, made him so completely another man from the Gilbert Hartland had hitherto known, the restless, ill-bred, and ill-at-ease Gilbert of the drawing-room, that it seemed as if a film had fallen from his companion's eyes.

He now beheld the commanding officer, cool in danger, alert in following up a victory, wary of possible evils even in the hour of success, quick of eye and tongue, but thoughtful and considerate for the same inferiors, from whom his whole demeanor compelled respect and subservience.

Hartland had, he now owned, disliked and despised Rosamund's friend. Despise him he never could again, and he resolved at once to begin to conquer the dislike.

Nothing but his own peculiar position in the Lis-card household had hitherto prevented his openly showing the feelings with which he had regarded the guest so often to be met with there; and although he had not approved of Lady Caroline's tactics, and had been vexed and revolted by the final explosion, he had devoutly wished, *his fair cousin had fired up on behalf of any one else,*

All this was past. Honor and justice urged him to remain neutral no longer.

To say nothing against Major Gilbert had been all very well heretofore ; but now to pass by his merit, and let it be supposed that want of polish could still outweigh sterling worth, was not to be thought of.

Gilbert had shown himself to be a gallant, intrepid fellow, inspired by a noble humanity which it would be a crying shame not to recognize and rate at its true value ; and what did his callousness to the trifling proprieties and *convenances* of society signify in comparison ?

The subject of these reflections should now be viewed with another eye.

It seemed to him that Gilbert's voice, look, manner,—all were changed. He spoke tersely and unaffectedly : he looked happy—as who would not have looked happy ?—but neither elated nor important. And, best of all, there was, in the place of any affected jocularly or indifference, a seriousness that became the moment well. Nothing of this was lost upon the other, who, betwixt compunction for the past and plans for the future, scarce understood his own perceptions, but whose expressive silence and anxious solicitude for the comfort of his charge—for in that light he now looked upon Gilbert—betrayed the workings of his breast. He was undergoing a mental revolution.

Not so, however, Lady Caroline.

Lady Caroline was more annoyed with Gilbert for having saved one life, then she would have been if he had taken twenty.

Why should he have been the one ? Why could no one else have pulled the boy out ? Not Hartland, of course ;—in her secret soul she felt that little Billy did not necessitate *that*,—but one of the gardeners, or laborers, or anybody on whom she could have bestowed a sovereign and a few icy words of commendation. It was absurd to suppose that the boy need

have been drowned but for Major Gilbert. As usual, Major Gilbert had put himself forward, and exaggerated the danger, and would make his own story of it afterward.

"Among all our own people, do you mean to tell me there was no one you could have sent in after the child?" she demanded of her husband when all was over, and he was disposed to be carried away, as Hartland had been, in praise of the gallant deed.

"You can hardly 'send in' a man to certain death, my dear," replied he, promptly for him. "The time is gone by when you or I could have said to a retainer, 'Minion, take that pool at thy peril'; and Hodge knows it."

"Hodge!"

"Hodge in the abstract: Netley, Henry, William, and all the rest of them. They wisely considered their own precious carcasses were quite as much to them as Billy Barley's was to him; and I expect even Barley himself would merely have brushed his sleeve across his eye if Gilbert had not been there."

"Would he have seen his own son drowned before his face without putting out his finger to save him?"

"Putting out his whole hand would not have saved him, unless the man could swim—which he can't."

"They could have thrown a rope."

"Which would have been whirled out of reach in an instant. Besides, how can you suppose for a moment that a child in the agony of drowning would ever look for a rope?"

"Well, never mind," said Lady Caroline shortly. "The boy is saved, and his parents may be thankful some one was there, it matters not who, to save him. I should think they would put a stop to any one's fishing in the mill-stream after this. I have often said how dangerous it was. But, Theodore,"—Mr. Liscard's Christian name was Theodore—"I do hope—I do beg, that you will do your best to prevent any display of silly enthusiasm on the part of the

girls when they meet Major Gilbert. Of course they will be ready to deify him. He is the sort of person to enjoy that; and I am surprised he has had the good sense to go off to his quarters, instead of staying on here to be *fêted*."

"Has he had anything hot to drink?"

"Oh yes, Hartland has seen to that. Hartland has gone with him in the brougham to see him home. Really Hartland has been like a brother to that tiresome man—"

—"Nonsense!" said Mr. Liscard sharply.

Lady Caroline jumped in her chair. She was the last woman in the world to be "nonsensed" at.

"My dear!" she began.

—"My dear!" retorted her husband. His eyes were blue; he was ready for the fray.

"Nonsense?" repeated Lady Caroline, with a haughty frown; but she was stopped again.

—"I tell you it is nonsense, sheer, ridiculous nonsense,"—declared the doughty scholar, showing her ladyship he could bristle as well as she,—*"the way in which you set yourself against this Major Gilbert from the first moment you cast eyes upon him, for no reason at all that I can see. For no reason that is any reason, at all events. He does not suit you; he is not a ladies' man; he is not—ahem! eminently a gentleman. He is too talkative and assertive, and engrosses too much of the conversation in the general circle. I suppose he would be called bumptious. But that is one of the faults of the day. It is absurd to blame a young man for being like other young men."*

"Not like Hartland."

"Hartland! What has Hartland got to do with it? Why should he and Gilbert be compared? Hartland tickles your fancy, so you must needs shape every one's coat to his pattern. Hartland is well enough; but I must say, Caroline, that if you want to make him repugnant to me, you can not adopt a

better course than by dinning his praises all day and every day into my ears, as you do,—and I suspect Rosamund feels the same."

It was now her turn for "Nonsense!" but the shot told. She wondered if it could be, could possibly be, the truth? She was as nearly being silenced as she had ever been in her life.

"Hartland, as I say, is very well," proceeded Mr. Liscard, who had his own reasons for pursuing his advantage. "But he is not anything out of the way. He would have cut but a sorry figure by the side of the mill-stream to-day, if the despised Gilbert had not been there."

"It is a shame to say so. He would have done it if he could."

"Ay, but could he? Not only swimming powers, but pluck, nerve, brains, all were needed, and all of those Gilbert had to give."

"What could Hartland have done that he did not do?"

"You miss the point. I am not blaming Hartland; but what, as you rightly ask, could he have done? Nothing—stood by, and seen a life lost! Caroline, you are wrong; I tell you, you are wrong. You undervalue a man of sense and valor and unblemished reputation, because he—pshaw!—upsets his wine-glass!"

"It is not that—it is not that. You have no right to say it was that," protested she, almost in tears of indignation. "All along I have felt the same about him—all along I have told Rosamund how I felt. I knew he would give me more trouble yet—I knew he would. Oh, why did he ever come to the place? Tiresome, odious man! And you, Theodore, to take his part! I could not, no, I could not believe it. If, instead of standing up for this—this forward, impertinent, vulgar upstart, you would help me to be rid of him, and back me up in my endeavors to get him out of Rosamund's way, you would be doing

your part, and not leaving to me all a parent's duty in the matter."

"I am by no means disposed to leave to you all a parent's duty in the matter."

"No? You *will* do your duty by her?"

"Certainly."

"You will take her away, since he cannot be got to budge. You will separate them at once—to-morrow."

"Ah! But who said that was my duty?"

"It is surely your duty to save your child from an unequal marriage."

"It depends upon what you mean by 'unequal.'"

"Is he a fit husband for your daughter, Theodore?"

"I think he is, Caroline."

CHAPTER XIV.

HARTLAND'S RESOLUTION.

" But when he learns that you have blest
Another with your heart,
He'll bid aspiring passion rest,
And act a brother's part."

—SHERIDAN.

ALMOST any other man who had done what Gilbert had done would have been in bed the next day, groaning with aches and pains, cold, or rheumatism,—but the hardy soldier's constitution was proof against them all.

Of temperate habits, he understood the use of stimulants on occasion; and on the evening following his adventure in the mill-stream he drank hot brandy-and-water until aware that the fumes were mounting to his head, then sank beneath the blankets; and in the profuse perspiration thus induced, and with all emotions, recollections, and anticipations lulled to rest, he slept long and soundly, and awoke with only a slight headache—the result of the brandy—to tell that he had ever had anything to beware of.

One glorious, all-embracing yawn convinced him of the fact.

" Not even stiff, by Jove ! " he exclaimed joyfully ; " well, good luck to Billy Barley ! for, if I am not mistaken, this clinches my matter. Her face was enough, my beautiful, brave Rosamund ! How she looked at me ! How plainly all could read what was passing in her heart ! It was rough on a fellow to have to run off at such a moment ; but if I had not, who knows in what case I might have been this morning ? No, no : *discretion* was the tip last night for me ; but

to-day, ay, to-day!"—and he rose on his elbow, and rang the bell with a peal that told its own story. No sick and sorry invalid was in the apartment whence that summons emanated. "Nevertheless, for once I'll try a lady's remedy, and breakfast in bed," quoth the major, stretching himself again; "these September mornings are chilly, and my pores have been finely opened. I'll wait till the sun has warmed the air a little. Let me see, we shall be into October in a few days; no wonder it's getting to feel autumnal. Bring me up a good trayful," to the servant; "and as quick as you can, like a good fellow, for I am as hungry as a hunter."

His breakfast tasted good, uncommonly good, that morning. Every mouthful had its appropriate seasoning of pleasing reflection, and with every draught from the coffee-cup was inhaled some new and joyful consideration.

Now it was the grasp of Mr. Liscard's hand,—now Lady Caroline's reluctant congratulations,—now, and best—far best of all—Rosamund's glowing, expressive silence. Other and graver thoughts were there, but can he be blamed if, as time passed, these last assumed the ascendancy? His own life was at its crisis.

Even the new warmth of Lord Hartland's tone and manner could add something to the cup which was already brimming over, and with that remembrance he felt that he had now really nothing left to wish for.

The coffee-cup had barely been set down empty ere Hartland's card was sent up.

"Lord Hartland!" exclaimed Gilbert. "Sent to inquire, I suppose?"

"Here himself, sir: but I was not to trouble you, when he heard you were not up yet. But I said I would just bring up the card, sir."

"Why, of course. But," said Gilbert, casting a hasty glance round the small and somewhat bare apartment, "I wish I had thought of that. I can't see him here. But I shall never get down in time.

Besides, I—my head is still rather muzzy. What in the name of goodness am I to do?"

The servant waited in silence.

"He must come up, I suppose," concluded his master, at last: "here, pull the counterpane straight; and open the window; and carry those breakfast things away; and don't leave the brandy-bottle, you fool," calling after the retreating figure in a rising voice. Then, *sotto voce*: "Of all the mornings in the world to take! Never did such a thing in my life before, as stop in bed for breakfast. And everything so uncomfortable too!" looking disconsolately around, while awaiting the approach of his visitor,—and to do the speaker justice, his chagrin was not ill-founded, for a neater or trimmer apartment than his own was not usually to be found. Chagrin and discomfiture, and every vexing sensation fled, however, at Hartland's entrance. The grip of his hand, the gleam of his eye, even the tone of his "Good-morning," were signs unmistakable of the new terms on which the two were now to be with each other.

"Awfully kind of you. I am afraid—hasn't he cleared a chair?" said Gilbert, sitting up and looking about. "I say! I am ashamed. The idiot, never to see—well, perhaps that's the best place," as his visitor sat down upon the bed. "I don't know when I have been so unfit to be seen,—but the fact is, I just threw down my clothes anywhere last night, and rummaged about to get things to pile on the bed,—and then I would not let my servant in to put me straight, as I wanted to go off to sleep."

"None the worse, are you?" said Hartland, who saw nothing amiss.

"Not a bit; oh no. Only lazy, as you see. 'Pon my word, I am ashamed to be caught like this."

"I did not expect to find you up."

"Did you not! I'm up, and down, and breakfasted, and out-of-doors, by this time as a rule."

"I dare say ; but you don't go about saving drowning boys in mill-dams as a rule."

Gilbert laughed. "Is the little chap all right?"

"His mother has got him in bed likewise. I looked in at the cottage on my way here, thinking you would be glad to know. Oh, he'll do well enough ; and it ought to be a lesson to the whole of them—which it won't. However, you have done your part. I say," suddenly, "is it possible for a man of my age to learn to swim?"

"You can't swim?"

"I never learned."

"Of course, any one can learn," said Gilbert, "but very few seem to do so in after-life. Odd, isn't it, that, as a rule, sailors can't swim?"

"How did you learn?"

"At Eton."

Eton had done so much for him, if it had done no more. It had not been able to fulfill its wonted boast; no art, no association, no discipline could turn Frederick Gilbert into a gentleman, but he had gained some advantages from his stay there.

"Ah, I had not the chance," observed his companion quietly.

"Where were you?"

"Nowhere."

"Not at any public school?"

"My father could not afford it."

"I forgot. Of course, you were born and bred in India."

"Born, but not bred. I was sent to England at ten years old ; but it was not for another two years that I was put to school,—and then only to a grammar-school."

"Indeed?"

"Yes," said Hartland, looking him in the face.

"My education took place at an English grammar-school ; and at seventeen I left that, entered the service, and sailed for India. I know very little ; I have

learned next to nothing. They tell me that it is my own fault; it may be—the fact remains. There is not a man of my age who could not put me to shame in a hundred ways." And he got off the bed, and walked to the window. In the bitterness which prompted the confession, there was another emotion which he was fain to hide, an involuntary comparison between himself and the man to whom he was speaking. Without having possessed a single early advantage, cut adrift from a cheerless home while still a stripling, imprisoned within the narrowest range of experience during the best part of his early youth, hampered by want of money and influence, until money and influence were no longer needed as means to an end, Hartland was yet conscious that he in himself was not unworthy of the name he bore; but no one knew, no one would ever have dreamed of that strange longing for an ideal past which ever and anon rose up within his breast. If he had had Gilbert's chances!—And even as it was! But no; he chid himself for the thought. The other was the superior; why should he detract through envy?

He stood at the window, looking out.

"It is a pretty stretch of country, isn't it?" said Gilbert, thankful to change the subject. "I don't know that I ever saw a prettier bit of country."

"It is pretty."

"And such lots of nice people about. I don't know that I ever was in a better neighborhood."

Hartland was silent. It was not for him to praise the neighborhood.

"Of course, it is nothing to you whether the people are disposed to be sociable or not," continued the speaker. "You are independent; you can go anywhere you like, choose your own associates, and make your own circle; in short, you are Lord Hartland, and Lord Hartland will find open doors anywhere and everywhere. But for me it is different,"—for it was now his turn for modesty,—"I am tied here, whether

I will or not ; and, of course, it is a great matter to find houses of the right sort. Jolly and friendly, you know. I hate your prim and starch houses—" he stopped short on the extreme edge of a blunder.

Hartland was still by the window with his back turned ; but something, an almost imperceptible movement, betrayed that he had heard and understood.

(" If I am ever to get on ahead, now is my time," concluded Gilbert swiftly ; " I must and will have it out now.") " Lord Hartland," said he aloud, " I wonder if I should be trespassing too severely on your kindness and our acquaintanceship"—(he would have liked to say friendship, but refrained)—" if I ask you to listen to me for a few minutes, and—and—and—the fact is, that I have no one, not a soul here, whom I can take into my confidence, not one at least who can give me a word of advice, or encouragement, or—or anything. They are very good fellows, but they don't know the world ; at least, ahem ! not in the way I mean," plucking nervously at the sheet, and rumpling it between his fingers. " The long and the short of the matter is, I am in for it at last ; the old story, you know—and—and I suppose every man feels the same some time or other, and this is my time, d'ye see ?"—he broke off with so anxious and wistful an attempt at a laugh, that there could be no doubt as to what it conveyed. He was too deeply in earnest for any real security.

Hartland bent his head. He would have liked to nod, and thought he did nod cordially and sympathetically ; but, as a matter of fact, the slow and thoughtful downward incline of the neck could not have been connected with the term in the mind of any one.

" May I go on ?" proceeded Gilbert, seeing he was not repulsed. " Of course I have no right to trouble you with my affairs—"

" Oh, it is all right. No trouble."

" It is your cousin, Rosamund Liscard, you know."

Yes, Hartland knew. He could not pretend he did not know, and his monosyllabic response betrayed neither surprise nor anything else.

"Yes?"

"I think that I may say she and I understand each other," continued the lover, more fluently now that the ice was broken. "We have not known each other long; we have not been altogether slow over it; but I have shown my sentiments pretty openly, and Miss Liscard—"

—"Has shown hers?"

"No, no; hardly that. Of course I did not mean that. No, hang it! I have no right to say that. But without any harm, a girl may—may—I hardly know how to put it, but I assure you that I would not for the world be supposed to hint that—in short, I only mean that, so far, I have certainly not received any discouragement. At least that is my own impression; but perhaps you would be so kind—so very kind—as to tell me what you think? I may be—I hope to heaven I am not—but it is quite possible that I may be altogether mistaken, and deceiving myself."

Could Em and Etta but have heard him!

And yet Gilbert, in his present embarrassment and timidity, was, truth to tell, an infinitely preferable person in the eyes of any one unbiased, to the confident and consequential only son of the family, so dear to the family heart.

His own people might bow before their idol; but he would hardly have found favor in Lord Hartland's eyes, had it occurred to him to shine as he was wont to do, when revolving in his own sphere. As it was, there was really nothing at which umbrage could reasonably be taken; and accordingly, "I think you have a very good chance," could be said with all the sincerity and readiness the occasion seemed to demand.

The major's eyes glistened. "You think she likes me?"

"I am sure she likes you."

"But—ah—hem—eh?"

"Oh, no 'buts,'" said Hartland, laughing.

"Your tone seemed to imply, did it not—eh?"

"—What?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I fancied there was something more coming."

"There may have been," replied Hartland, after a momentary hesitation. "To be frank, there was. But it does not relate, or, at least, not directly so, to my cousin. I had, I believe, a passing thought of some one else—"

("Old Bluegown," assented Gilbert, inwardly. "So had I—many passing thoughts; ugly ones too. I know what you mean very well, young gentleman—a great deal better than I like to know, in fact. And it was on this very point I required your aid and reassurances. I thought I should gather from you how the wind blows in that quarter; and so I have. Deuced cold, evidently. He does not wish to say anything direct, but I can see plainly enough that friend Hartland is signaling me to look out for squalls.")

"Your best chance of success," said Hartland, rousing himself so suddenly that his companion almost started,—“indeed, if I may speak plainly, your only chance is to go straight to Mr. Liscard, and ask his permission to address his daughter, showing, at the same time, as no doubt you are able to do, that you can maintain her properly."

"Exactly my own view"—Gilbert rose on his elbow eagerly; "as you say, I can do the thing properly. Oh yes, my old dad will come down with the sinews of war. He is a rich man, and I am his eldest child and only son. Oh, I am not afraid. He knows what is up, for I have sounded him already; and of course the connection is all he could desire. Otherwise I should never have presumed—oh, you are not going?"

"I must, I fear. Time flies."

"You think, then, that I may hope?"

"Certainly."

"It is a plunge, you know," observed the lover, anxious to be satisfied, but ready to wish that the answers had been a shade less laconic, "but after all—"

"After all, *you* are not the man to shirk a plunge," rejoined Hartland, with another effort at cordiality. "Your feat of yesterday—"

"Oh, that was nothing."

"Let us hope it was a good omen, and that you will be crowned a second time with success." He paused a moment, then held out his hand. "With all my heart I wish it you, Gilbert." He then left the room.

"Good fellow, capital fellow," murmured Gilbert, looking after him with renewed animation. "I will say that for Hartland, there is no humbug about him. The sort of fellow you need to know, though. Now and then, even to-day when he was so awfully kind and friendly, yet even to-day I could have fancied I detected here and there a touch of the *bluegown* manner, as if he had caught it of that infernal woman,—oh, confound it! I must really take care what I say. I must teach my tongue to crop its adjectives if Lady Caroline is going to be my mamma-in-law. As for Hartland, it will be jolly having such a swell for a cousin; and he and Rosamund are first-rate friends, I can see that. We shall hit it off, all round, we three. Then, who cares for the rest?"

He bounded out of bed, rang the bell, and fell to the operations of his toilet with new life in his veins. "Now for action; now for victory; now for the fairest prize in Christendom," he cried gayly; "in one word, now for Rosamund! Would that I could fly to her on the wings of love and the morning; but as that can not be, at any rate I will get through every single thing that has to be done by three o'clock, put all in order, and be off then to strike while the iron's hot—and if I am not an engaged man by this time to-morrow, I know whose fault it will *not* be."

So cogitating, with the promptitude and dispatch

which characterized all his actions, he proceeded vigorously, and was soon hearing reports, examining papers, and giving audiences, as though solely and exclusively occupied by the business and routine of military life.

Somewhere about the same hour, another conversation, in effect somewhat similar to that above narrated, and of full as much importance to our story, was being carried on within a few miles of Longminster.

Rosamund had walked over early to the Abbey—for what reason she herself best knew—and had found her aunt alone.

"Nobody but me, my love," said Lady Julia briskly. "Hartland will be in presently, for he has been gone some time. He started directly after breakfast to ride over to Longminster; he likes an early ride, you know, and he and I are both early people," (she had been the latest in the world, till Hartland's Indian habits had reformed her), "so he thought he would go and inquire after Major Gilbert this morning."

"Is he gone there?" said Rosamund, sparkling up.

"Yes. You will hear the report, if you wait till he returns,—though I dare say your mother will send also." It was characteristic that she said "your mother," not "your father"; that no one ever thought of any other person than Lady Caroline doing anything at King's Common.

"I don't know. Perhaps. But I think—I dare say he will come to us," said Rosamund shyly.

"And oh, my dear, what a fuss you will make about him if he does!—and so you ought. The dear little boy also—not but what he is the worst boy in the Sunday school; but then this will be a lesson to him. And to think of that good, kind, wonderful Major Gilbert risking his far more valuable life—well, perhaps I ought not to say more valuable, only it really *is*, you know. And just think what it would have

been if the one had been given for the other ! Terrible, quite terrible. Oh, it was a splendid, a daring act ! I feel quite proud, quite elated by such a thing having been done at King's Common. It was a mercy all of you were there."

"Not that we did any good."

"I mean that your brave, noble Major Gilbert was. How I wish I had been with you ! And yet it would have been too horrible. None of you went to the pool ?"

"No. Mamma would not let us."

"But you saw him—you spoke to him afterward ? I could envy you to have had such a hero among you. I, too, must add my word. You say he will come over to-day ?"

"I don't know. I think so. Aunt Julia ?"

"Well, my love ?"

"Did Hartland—did he speak as if—was he—what did he tell you about it all ?"

"Oh, my dear, you never heard anything like it. I told him he was really eloquent. Hartland, who is usually so composed—you know him, Rosamund—Hartland is not an enthusiastic person ; now, is he ?"

"Certainly not, Aunt Julia."

"Would you have believed he could be carried away ?"

"Well, no—I don't know. I almost think I could, if—the occasion warranted it."

"You have never seen him so, I am sure ?"

"No."

"You are turning something over in your mind, Rosamund. Ah, well, I dare say you are right. Young people are sharper-sighted than old ones, and I dare say you understand Hartland ; but, however, I was surprised. It did my heart good to listen."

"He—I suppose he thought it a fine thing to do ?"

"He said he had never seen a finer. The coolness, the judgment that Major Gilbert displayed were beyond everything. His calm facing of a horrid death,"

proceeded Lady Julia, with ineffable enjoyment, "was what struck Hartland most : his knowledge that if the boy saw him he would seize and drag him down—my dear, you are changing color, I ought not to have said it ; but now that all is happily over—"

"Oh, yes," said Rosamund, with a struggling smile, "all is happily over—in that way. But—but, dear auntie—don't you know that there is still—that Major Gilbert—"

"—Why, dear me ! yes, I remember now, to be sure," cried Lady Julia, with a sudden sense of enlightenment,— "I remember, of course, my dear child, to what you refer ; but surely you are not troubling about that ? There was a little scene, because your mamma did not fancy your new acquaintance, and you felt that she had been rather ungracious ; was not that it ? Oh, but after this, there need be no fear. The regiment is soon going away ; and for the few times she need meet Major Gilbert—"

"—Aunt Julia—"

"Well, love ?"

"Why should it be only a few times ?"

"There can not be many more meetings. The summer is over, and the winter gayeties never begin much before Christmas. I understand that Major Gilbert will be gone by that time."

"You think he will go without—a word ?"

"A word, my dear ?"

• "That he—that we—that he and I— ?"

"That he and you ?" murmured Lady Julia, still in bewilderment ; but then suddenly she almost shrieked, as if a thunderbolt had struck her, "That he and you ?"

Then Rosamund held up her head.

"Yes, aunt, you know now what I mean. *He—and I.*"

For a moment there was not another word spoken. The overwhelming revelation, the heaving bosom of the defiant girl—for it was again Rosamund, up in

arms, who spoke—were too much for the unfortunate recipient of her confidence, and Lady Julia sank into a chair, her eyes starting from her head.

"He—and—you," she repeated at last, "I—I, why, Rosamund, I am dreaming, I am deaf,—surely I am deaf or dreaming," putting her hand to her brow; "surely, surely,—oh, dear me, dear me!"—a pause; then all at once broke forth the torrent: "I can not believe it, I can not believe it! It would be too dreadful. Oh, my dear, dear, dearest niece, you can not, oh, you must not mean *that*—not *that*, anything but *that*, my own Rosamund; oh, you shall not be urged or pressed to marry any one; only, my darling, wait; only wait, and do not, do not think of this terrible, foolish idea again."

"Foolish idea!" cried Rosamund, with a flash. Every injudicious syllable was a rivet in her resolution.

"My dear, I did not mean that. No, you are not to be blamed. It is not foolish, it is only natural; you see him with this halo of glory round his head—"

"Nonsense," said Rosamund angrily. "You talk, aunt, as if I were a child."

"But, my dear, my darling, what else are you? Who are you, to judge for yourself, and to know what is best for you? And though Major Gilbert is brave and noble, still—oh, dear, how to say it? Oh, my child, think of your poor mother and all of us. Could he ever become one of the family?" pleaded the poor lady, with grotesque pathos; "could we ever call him by his name? Could he come and go among ourselves, and take his place—?"

—"Of course he could."

"I am making you angry, my poor dear; and heaven knows that is the last thing I wish to do," wailed poor Lady Julia, clasping her hands in an agony of perplexity and despair; "I have no tact, no sense. To go and take you up seriously, when after all—" *with a happy thought*, "after all, I dare say you

did not above half mean what you said, Rosamund. I have been precipitate, as usual. Carried away by my own silly fancies, have I not? Say that I have, love—come; tell Aunt Julia she is an old goosey, as she always was, and we will forget it all. Come, dear Rosamund,” holding out a trembling hand. “What? . . . Oh, take it, darling, take it! Rosamund . . . ? Tears . . . ? But, my child, you know nothing, utterly, absolutely nothing of this man; you have only met him at a few summer parties, you have danced once or twice together at a ball; oh, you do not, you can not care for him, not as you would care for—well, well, you *think* you do. You do not yourself see that this is not—that this is only what we *all* feel for a brave, gallant hero; I am sure your mother and I, and every one of us, we all feel the same—an immense admiration and gratitude, and—and—everything else for Major Gilbert as Billy Barley’s deliverer, and an honest guest, and Hartland’s friend, and—anything, yes, anything but *that*. And you, dearest child, you can not think of him either in any other light. You can not possibly imagine that you love him?” A pause. Then springing to her feet, “Good heavens! Rosamund, you would not marry the man?”

“But I would,” said Rosamund.

CHAPTER XV.

HE WAS THE SYMBOL OF HER TRIUMPH.

“Stay—if I am never crost,
Half the pleasure will be lost.
Lovers may of course complain
Of their trouble and their pain ;
But if pain and trouble cease,
Love without it would not please.”

—ANON.

RIGHT or wrong, wise or foolish, if Lady Caroline's daughter had said she would do a thing, that thing would she do ; and thus it came to pass that the happy major had the happiness of reporting his happiness home by that very evening's post.

The letter went in Mr. Liscard's own post-bag, and was written at Lady Caroline's own davenport.

She was upstairs, poor lady, dressing for dinner—that dinner to which Gilbert had at last made good many intentions of stopping, and it was well indeed she was so, as she was thus saved knowing the insult that was being added to her injury.

“May I write here ?” inquired the now privileged guest, seating himself easily in the well-known, well-detested chair, and thinking, as he did so, how some day, but not just yet, he would have a laugh with his betrothed over the light in which it had hitherto been regarded by him. “I want just to send my old pater a line,” he added ; “he is expecting it.”

“Is he ?” Rosamund was standing by, triumphant and successful. The great ordeal had been gone through, and she had carried the day in the very teeth of bitter opposition and reproach.

Her mother had been made to yield, her father had

unexpectedly stood forward on her side, and her lover had shown himself bold and resolute, and had furthermore justified his being so. The few words which she had overheard passing between her parents subsequently had been music to her ear. "The settlement will be exceptionally handsome, and the position perfectly suitable. We should be absolute fools to refuse," had been uttered in her father's tones with an energy to which no one was less accustomed than his wife, and perhaps it was in consequence of this that her reply, "The thing is done. You have given your consent," was muttered in lower and more uncertain accents than was usual on her part. She had then been silent for a long time, and Rosamund had run away rejoicing.

She stood rejoicing now by Gilbert's side.

He was in her eyes the symbol of her victory. For him she had battled and won, and she was proud of her prize. His heroism of the previous day was still investing him with its glory, added to which here he was, such a fine, big, handsome fellow, that it was in itself something to call such a man all her own.

And then he loved her. And Rosamund had never been loved before. It was a new and wonderful experience.

"Why, you see, I'm a dutiful son," explained Gilbert, truthfully enough, "and," he added, with a laugh, "moreover, I am a dependent one. You understand that, eh, Rosamund?"

She had been "Rosamund" for fully two hours now.

"Oh yes." Not that she did, or cared,—but it would have been "Oh yes" to anything at the moment.

"I could not have spoken to your father without first consulting mine. I had to show I was not exactly a pauper, you know," said Gilbert, smiling complacently.

("The settlement exceptionally handsome," quoth

Rosamund internally, and was pleased that he had so acquitted himself; but for her own part she would almost have preferred poverty. Romantic eighteen not infrequently does.)

"They will all be immensely pleased," continued the writer, opening the paper-and-envelope case, and proceeding to rummage through its contents.

"Are you looking for anything?" inquired she.

He was, in the hope of turning up a sheet with a coroneted stamp; for, not being learned in such lore, he could not help thinking the august Lady Caroline must be entitled to such.

"Is that paper not right?" questioned Rosamund, solicitously. "I am afraid it is rather a small size. Mamma never writes on any but the smallest paper, and no one else uses her davenport. This is her especial davenport, you know. There is every kind of paper on the library table. Would you not rather—?"

But he would not rather at all.

It took his fancy amazingly thus to set his foot, as it were, on the neck of his enemy at the very outset of his career, and he protested that the smallest size paper in the world would do for all that was required.

Then she had to send her message, and that in her own hand; and she found it strangely pleasant to have the "little hand"—which, by the way, was not particularly little, and had never been noticed before—kissed and admired, and the writing itself praised—though it was about as bad as a well-educated young lady's very best copybook handwriting usually is.

Gilbert, like a true gallant, was in love with his fair at all points, and stuck at nothing. Neither black nor golden hair had, he vowed, any attractions for him; nothing but brown—warm, red, waving brown (passing his hand over the brown in question)—could ever command his homage. Tall women he detested; likewise short, broad, stumpy ones. Rosamund's height was perfection. Likewise were her eyes, nose,

and mouth perfection; likewise were her beautiful voice and ringing laugh; likewise, moreover, was her dancing, and her running, and her riding—to listen to him was like drinking one long, deep, perfumed, intoxicating draught.

At last she got away, scarce knowing what ground she stood upon; how she felt; where, or what she was.

In her hand were the flowers he had bidden her wear; her ear rang with his sweet flatteries; and her cheek was flushed with his kisses.

What a day it had been! She was trembling all over with excitement; thoughts, recollection, hopes and wishes whirling tumultuously through her brain; gleeful anticipations, making all the future dance before her vision; while even the present was far, far beyond anything the past had ever been.

What was now to her the dullness, the grimness, the oppression of that endless routine, which had seemed as if it must go on for ever and ever in that house? What were the rules, and restrictions, and debates, and cogitations over every trifle, and difficulties over the making of every new acquaintance, and prohibitions in which Lady Caroline delighted?

She was about to flee them all. The yearnings of her soul were to be satisfied at last. Emancipation was at hand.

What though she must now speed like lightning through a toilet delayed to the last minute? Anything, put on anyhow, would look well on such a night. Little Esther, the handmaiden, understood very distinctly the hurry and the frolic of such a dressing, and participated heart and soul.

All the household were Gilbert's adherents. If they thought at all of Lord Hartland, the other eligible bachelor, it was to conjecture that he was not yet ripe for matrimony, but that he would, in all probability, one day bring home a titled dame, who would reinstate *his* fortunes, and enable him to fill Lady Julia's place when Lady Julia should be no longer there.

That day, all devoutly hoped, would be long in coming.

For good Julia was greatly beloved, and her summer treats and winter festivals, her gifts, her charities, her indulgence, and her easy rule, were appreciated scarcely less at King's Common than at the Abbey itself.

So mylord was not to wed just yet. That being settled, Major Gilbert was a fine suitor for Miss Rosamund; and his being in her lady-mother's black books rather added to his popularity than diminished it. He had precisely the sort of jovial, authoritative air which most tells with inferiors; he was liberal with his money; and he gave himself no airs. Added to which, it was a treat to see him riding at the head of his men through the streets of Longminster; and a comely corporal, spanking over now and again, in full uniform, with a note or a message, and an important notion of the officer who had dispatched it—all went into the same scale.

It stood to reason that the rescue of Billy Barley placed already the well-disposed hearts of all at Gilbert's feet.

"Do be quick, Esther. There's the five-minutes gong."

"If you jump about like that, miss, I shall never find the fastenings."

"Skip one or two. No one will be the wiser."

"I shall have done in a minute, miss."

"How nicely this frock fits, Esther!"

"I thought you had complained of the shoulder-straps, Miss Rosamund. I had been going to see about altering them to-morrow."

"Never mind troubling about them now. I must have been mistaken. They look very well to-night."

"Do they not cut you, miss?"

"Cut me? No. Or, if they do, I don't feel it. Oh, they are all right—quite nice, quite comfortable." ("And they will not be needed long," thought the fair

wearer, with a bounding heart. "Soon, soon I shall leave them, and all besides, behind me. Oh, what a new, new life it will be! How delightful, how free, how glorious! He says I shall go everywhere with him,—travel from place to place, see fresh sights, and places, and people, at every turn. We shall never be in the same spot two years running. Perhaps we shall be ordered abroad. At any rate, he is to take me abroad; and when he gets leave we are to go wandering off shooting and fishing in all kinds of wild places. How different it will be to going about—even if I ever *had* gone about—with papa and mamma! Then, we should have engaged carriages, and private rooms, and all the rest of it. I should never have so much as got down to a *table d'hôte*, not I. How Frederick would laugh if he knew the sort of way we do things! I know there has been an idea floating about lately of a trip next summer. A trip? Oh, I can guess the sort of trip it would have been! Thank you, mamma; I'll leave it for Catherine now, if you please. But Frederick and I together, what fun we will have! He likes fun as much as I do. Even now the change has begun, for I am to be taken to the flower-show after all, and he scouted the very idea of our places being filled up at the luncheon. He said that all his fellows want to see me, and be introduced. What fun! How grand I shall feel! Some of the officers are married already; but I, as the major's wife, will take precedence of them all, for the colonel is not here. The idea of mamma and Aunt Julia not seeing all this, in their absurd infatuation about Hartland! I hope their eyes are opened at last. Why, Hartland went over on purpose to give his support to Frederick—at least I am sure he did. Frederick said he was very kind about it. Frederick said—")

"Miss Rosamund, you will never be finished if you don't stand still a moment."

"Oh yes, yes, yes. Yes, Esther, I shall,—I will,—I

am finished. There's a good Esther. What? Have I not washed my hands yet? Oh, this nice hot water," plunging in the round dimpled arms, "oh—how—nice! The second gong! Dear me! Dear me! Coming—coming—coming. My little gold locket, Esther. Oh, not that stupid old thing. The tiny one with the ruby, and the thin gold band for the neck to have the clasp fastened. There, that's it," bending her neck to have the clasp fastened. "There now, I'm off." And light as a swallow she skimmed down the broad oaken staircase, just as Major Gilbert appeared in the hall from another set of chambers.

He caught her in his arms—and Lady Caroline saw it.

They did not know she was there, and no one ever knew why she had been there, but there she was. Slowly making her way across the ante-room, whose door always stood open—a way she had never been known to take before, since it was a distinct room from her own dressing-room—Lady Caroline had been arrested by sounds from without, and turning round to seek the cause, she was an involuntary beholder of a spectacle which made every vein tingle.

There was Rosamund, her beautiful, brilliant young daughter, her wild, half-blown rosebud, the human being who had stirred a spark of natural feeling in her cold and selfish nature, for whom in her heart she had prognosticated a gorgeous destiny, and mapped out what that destiny should be—and there, holding her in his embrace, was the man who had frustrated her hopes, set her will at defiance!

Poor Gilbert! Little did he know the agony he was inflicting. His affectionate, exulting, monopolizing attitude ought perhaps have been kept for another and a more secluded spot; but still he might have been forgiven, or at least Lady Caroline might have turned away her eyes. She did neither. With deliberate tread she advanced to the doorway, and

like the knell of doom sounded her leaden accents, "Rosamund, I want you."

Gilbert's arms fell by his side ; Rosamund almost spurted from his embrace ; and both flushed with vexation.

"Pray remember," said Lady Caroline, loud enough for each offender to hear, "that there are others in this house beside yourselves. Do not let this occur again !" and the chill, measured tones seemed to clank like a prison chain round the bright, free moment gone before.

"Could mamma ever have been young ? Could she ever have loved ?" muttered the now humbled and indignant girl, following her parent with sullen, shamefaced steps, and not even reassured by the presence of her fellow-criminal ; "how unkind, how cruel of her, to-night of all nights, to speak to me like that ! And I had really been feeling sorry for her ; I had meant to win her round ; I had thought the worst was past. Oh, if mamma is going to be like that, how it will spoil everything for the present. I wonder how she can—I do wonder how she *can* !"

She looked at her mother. What a worn, fretted, wrinkled face was that ! A spasm seemed to cross the brow and contract the corners of the mouth as she took the arm which Gilbert could not choose but offer subsequently. Not a single word did she address to him. She could not. It was as if the power of controlling or disguising her feelings were gone. All were against her—her husband, her daughter, her guest, the very servant who stood behind her chair,—and they had overborne her by their weight ; but such was still her power, that they were awed and uneasy in her presence. The greatness of her affliction subdued their joy. The gloom upon her brow was harder to withstand than any open frown.

In vain did the combined forces struggle for serenity, for cheerfulness, and ease. The dancing light in Rosamund's eyes died out completely ere the

terrible meal was over; and long, long before the last dish had gone its round, her lover had given up attempting conciliation.

Of the three, the one who faced her ladyship from his seat at the bottom of the table was the least concerned. Mr. Liscard had asserted himself for once like a wise man, and from that wisdom point he did not mean to budge—but, having done so much, he had no notion of bestirring himself further. The young people might smooth their own path, for him. They had his sanction for treading it together,—but his sanction and his support were two very different things; and he did not, if the truth were told, find that he cared very particularly whether his support were needed or not. It had suited his notions of selfish ease to permit his daughter to choose her own lot, and as the lot chosen would effectually take her off his hands, it was next to nothing to him whether the way to it were set with thorns or roses. If Lady Caroline made herself unbearable, it was but hastening the wedding-day, and he could endure that; his principal reflection being, as we have seen, that for a man with twelve children, the having of one of them creditably, comfortably, and completely disposed of was too good a thing to be despised.

Even the mother's rage and disappointment were more respectable than the father's callous indifference.

"I suppose we must not slip off anywhere by ourselves, must we?" whispered Gilbert, when at length the wearisome repast was over, and the party had re-assembled, as lugubrious as before, in the drawing-room. He really felt as if he must escape the tainted atmosphere, poor fellow; it choked him, strangled him, unnerved and bewildered him. He had not expected it. With some pardonable self-complacency he had anticipated a little surprise, and a considerable *relenting on Lady Caroline's part*, once he had *made his offer with its appropriate accompaniments*;

and that, instead of this, he should be met with not only increased acerbity of countenance, but with the addition of a silence so profound, so hopeless, and so impenetrable that all seemed to quail before it, was discomfiting beyond measure.

He would not, however, suffer himself to be quite snuffed out. If he durst not speak to his love, nor touch her, nor hardly look at her before her jailer, he would make a shift to evade the jailer's watchfulness. "What do you say? Can we run off? To the library, or somewhere," he suggested accordingly.

The pair were by the piano, to which Rosamund had betaken herself under the pretext of arranging some music, on the opening of the dining-room door and the approach of her father and lover. It was, she well knew, the farthest spot to which she might go away from that motionless figure on the large, solemn sofa at the other end.

"Is not this far enough?" and she glanced round with a smile.

"By Jove! no. I should just say not. I have so much to say to you."

"Have you?"

"May I come over early to-morrow?"

"Oh yes—to luncheon."

"Not till luncheon?"

"Mamma does not care for visitors before then, you know."

"But I don't come to see 'mamma,'" protested Gilbert, laughing; "I should never think of intruding upon 'mamma' at all," he added maliciously. "You could meet me outside, couldn't you?"

"Perhaps I could—at least I think so—if—if," said Rosamund, with another hurried glance round—for, after all, she was but a simple girl, and all unversed in the pretty ways of our modern belles—"if mamma does not mind; but I think she would perhaps rather you came to the house." She could stand up and defy her mother to her face, but she would never de-

ceive her, she would not put out her foot by a single step on a slippery way.

Gilbert, looking at her, saw this, and in his heart approved. ("Jolly good little creature," he thought. "No underhand tricks about her. She did not even see that I meant to propose she should hold her tongue, so I'll hold my own now.")

"Well, ask mamma; and say I am coming to take you for a walk, or something," he suggested, good-humoredly. "She can not object to that, surely?"

"Oh, no. But, Major Gilbert—"

—"Major Gilbert! I say!"

"What is it?" quoth Miss Innocent, saucily.

"'Major Gilbert' indeed! And didn't I make you say the other three times running, before I would let you off this afternoon?"

"Oh, but give me time, just a few days' time," with a glad little laugh; "this has come about so quickly; and I hardly know—I *don't* know how I feel at all to-night."

"Why, that is just what I want to teach you," cried Gilbert, who was not inclined to begin the lesson under surveillance; "but how on earth am I ever to do it if we are to be always like this, in the middle of everybody? I wish you could see some of the houses I go to; they have regular mischief rooms—call them mischief rooms—which the girls and boys go off to, when they want to get out of the way, you know. Have their own little games, you know. I used to be rather a hand at that sort of thing myself,—but it was all by way of joke—I only did it because others did. I never really cared for any girl until—"

"Oh, take care!" Rosamund involuntarily stepped back a pace, with reddening brow. In his earnestness he had overlooked the men-servants, who, with the tea and coffee trays, were at his elbow, and she felt at the moment that, much as he might have to teach her, she had also something to teach him. *He must learn to have more regard for appearances.*

She now proposed music, hastily. "I will ask mamma if she would not like a song," she suggested, crossing the room; but Gilbert was nearly sure that the request, which was presently brought back, had never emanated from Lady Caroline. Her reception of the timid overture, her averted head, and the stubborn immobility of her form, were all rightly interpreted by him; it was possible that she had spoken—he did not think she had done as much—but she might; if so, however, he could have sworn that nothing but a withering permission to do as she chose had been accorded the petitioner.

"Treats my little girl as if she were the dirt of the earth," muttered the incensed lover to himself. "And to-night, too, when one would think a mother with any feeling at all—but she hasn't a particle. People say she is proud of Rosamund, but I'll be hanged if I see the force of such pride! She has astonished even me, has that woman, though I did think I knew her by this time. Who would have believed that she could mean to keep up her vile animosity even now? Well, if it comes to a tug of war, she'll get the worst of it; so look out, old lady. I must knuckle under for the present, but by-and-by, Lady Caroline, by-and-by—" and he sat down to the piano.

"Can I have a little more light?"

Rosamund turned to the nearest attendant. "Another pair of candles, William, please."

"That pair on the mantel-piece, that will do," amended Gilbert, accustomed to order things as he would; "here, bring those, will you?"

"I think mamma likes to have a pair there," said Rosamund gently. "William will bring some more in a minute." Unconsciously he had been on the eve of violating one of the greater proprieties of the place,—he had desired to disarrange the furniture without so much as a reference to its liege lady.

But the sea-song was heard at last, nevertheless; and one person present, at all events, enjoyed hear-

ing it, and hearing it for the first time. Mr. Liscard had an ear for, and a love of music, and he now felt that he had never been better nor less troublesomely entertained. The deadly dullness of his usual home-evenings made the present welcome contrast felt the more. He was not required to say anything, nor to do anything; he could spread himself out in his low chair, con his scientific journals by the light of the shaded lamp at his elbow; and the melodious strains of the distant singer, so far from disturbing his comfort, acted as an agreeable sedative.

He was really sorry when at length they ceased, and Gilbert rose to go.

It struck him that a son-in-law who could thus provide his own entertainment would be rather an acquisition to the party than otherwise; and as he roused himself to wish a cordial "good-night," it was with no disapproval that he beheld the tall figure turn its broad back on him and Lady Caroline alike, as both Rosamund's hands were held fast in those of her lover.

Rosamund's papa charitably put out his lamp. That gave him something to do, and he had a weakness for economizing light—the only economy he ever practiced. He now busied himself getting his fingers under the shade, turning round the button, and peering over the funnel to see if all were right; and even when the maneuver was over, he did not immediately obtrude upon the young couple. It made him almost angry to see his wife, drawn up to her full height, loom portentously forth from her seclusion ere anything more could pass; and he had never in his life been so near snubbing her ladyship in public, as when she bade him ring the bell the next moment.

The bell was to be rung for Major Gilbert to be shown out; and the tone in which Lady Caroline desired that such should be done, might have fittingly conveyed a command for his never being shown in again.

He never was shown in again—to her,

CHAPTER XVI.

"YOU CAN'T MEAN THAT?"

"Chances strange,
Disastrous accidents, and change
Come to us all;
Even in the most exalted state,
Relentless sweeps the stroke of fate;
The strongest fall."

—LONGFELLOW.

"FINE old place, but a shade sepulchral," quoth Major Gilbert to himself, as he stood on the doorstep at King's Common the following morning, awaiting a response to his summons. "Rows of closed windows ain't lively. I suppose there are windows open somewhere about the house, but it is a pity they don't show in front. Lord! how can people get on without fresh air, and on a day like this, too?"—for a soft and balmy south wind was gently fanning the tree-tops; and the closed windows, which had, moreover, their blinds drawn uncompromisingly down, certainly did seem to have an unreasonable ill-will against it. "What a time they are in answering!" cried he next, with a lover's impatience. But the next moment the door was noiselessly opened.

"Any one at home?"

He had made up his mind that he would not ask for Lady Caroline. If Lady Caroline chose to see him, and to be civil to him, well and good; he would make an effort to be civil in return, and preserve, in so far as he could, a decent appearance of having *nothing* to resent and forgive—but he was not going *to be* the one to make the advance. Whether she

were in or out on this morning should not matter to him an iota.

During the previous evening he had realized that if he ever meant to hold his own with his future mother-in-law—and this he most distinctly did mean—he must not lose a moment. He must get his hand in at once, brace himself persistently to disregard frowns and slights, and treat her ladyship with an easy, unconscious indifference which he was shrewd enough to perceive would be more galling than any amount of retaliation.

He would not be rude, but neither would he be vulnerable. He would present an impervious front, and baffle every attack by appearing not to perceive it. He would not let anything about the *blue gown* obtain the mastery over him. Accordingly his "Any one at home?" tripped readily out, and seemed to stand in need of no reply, for the speaker was on the mat within, wiping the mud from his boots—being a man of cleanly habits—the next minute; and it was not until he had put down his hat and stick, and pulled out his pocket-handkerchief, and stood ready to be preceded across the hall, that he perceived anything unusual about the man who had let him in.

It was a young under-footman who had done so, and who now stood by his side, the picture of awkward, nervous hesitation, most evidently at a loss how to proceed in a moment of difficulty.

"Hey! What's the matter?" demanded the visitor, stopping short in surprise, while half-a-dozen conjectures—all unpleasant ones—flashed into his brain at once.

Was there going to be any trouble ahead? Was yesterday's work capable of being undone to-day? Had mischief been brewing in the night? Rosamund, what of her? Her evident timidity and awe of her mother recurred, like lightning, to his memory. *Had, then, that unappeasable woman* reobtained her

wanted rule, and already stolen a march upon him, laid hands upon his betrothed, locked her up, canceled all promises, and ordered the doors to be shut upon himself? Had she—could she—have dared to do this?

That something was strangely amiss was but too evident, and the thing to discover was—what?

"We have had a terrible misfortin in the night, sir."

Gilbert drew a long breath of relief. What was a terrible misfortune to him? That would certainly not have been the fashion in which his dismissal would have been made known, and on that point all his present uneasiness and anxiety centered.

"Oh, indeed!" he said, with infinite comfort. "What is it, eh? But never mind; show me in, and I'll soon hear."

"I—I—I really don't know, sir; her ladyship, sir—"

"Confound it! let's have an end of this," cried Gilbert, with excusable impatience; "say what you have got to say and have done with it. I can't stop here all day while you hum and haw. Show me in to Lady Caroline," he added, in a sort of desperation, and turned toward the inner hall.

But this was too much. "Stop, sir, stop!" and William stepped back a pace; the next moment out came the thunderbolt: "Her ladyship is dead, sir. O Lord!" cried the poor young fellow, raising his two hands and letting them fall again, to enforce the full import of his words.

"Good God!" exclaimed Gilbert, glued to the ground whereon he stood. "Her ladyship is—*what?*"

"Yes, indeed, sir."

"Do you mean—but, no, you can't mean *that*? You can't possibly mean that Lady Caroline is—good heavens!" wiping his brow. "Eh?—what?—eh? Speak out, and speak plain, for God's sake, so that I can understand. Did you say that Lady Caroline is—?" but he could not articulate the word *himself*.

"Found dead in her bed this morning, sir. 'Tis an awful thing, sir," and the speaker looked indeed white and scared, for the news was scarce cold. "They thought at first it was a fit; and the maids and Mrs. Ossory was an hour in the room trying what they could do to bring her ladyship round,—but it was no use. And now the doctors have just gone, and they say she must have been dead at the first. Dr. Makin brought another gentleman with him to make sure. You must have met them in the drive, sir. They ain't been gone many minutes."

"No. I came the other way. But how—what—good heavens! I can't think. I never heard anything more awful. Found dead in her bed, and she seemed as well as any of us only last night! Was any reason given? Is she supposed to have been ill? Have they any idea how it was?"

"I heard Mrs. Ossory say as how her ladyship is supposed to have been ailing a long time, sir; and Mrs. Ossory thinks she often noticed that her ladyship was not herself at all of late. Mrs. Ossory thinks that perhaps it was the fright on Wednesday—"

"Wednesday? What—about the boy in the stream, do you mean? Oh, but Lady Caroline was as right as possible long after that; though certainly, to be sure—hum—ah—she did seem uncommonly silent and out of spirits last night. She certainly did that."

"Yes, sir. So Mrs. Ossory says, sir."

"Bless me—I never was so shocked in my life!" continued Gilbert, pulling his long mustache; and, for once in his life, completely at fault in respect of his next move. Should he depart or remain? He looked at William, and William looked at him, irresolution upon either face; but the result was that they moved solemnly across the hall together.

"Lady Julia and Lord Hartland is here, sir," whispered the man, as he opened the drawing-room door; but it did not appear that he meant they were

in the room, for it was empty, as a single glance showed.

Gilbert gazed mutely round.

He was inexpressibly bewildered and appalled, but it would be impossible to deny that he experienced also another sensation, and one equally novel to him at the moment—he breathed freely. For once in his life he heard the handle turn in the door, and stepped forward upon the soft carpet within without a qualm; for once he advanced from behind the large screen which guarded the entrance without trepidation; and for the first time he looked straight up and down, and round and round the spacious, gloomy apartment.

That it partook still of Lady Caroline at every pore was surely natural, yet it struck him as curious. He had almost expected to see an instantaneous upheaval and revulsion; but there was the davenport, the chair, the piano to whose refuge he had on the previous evening betaken himself, the pillar by which she had bidden him her stony “good-night”—that “good-night” to which there would never now be a “good-morrow.”

Every window was darkened, and the place was sunk in gloom. It occurred to him as a strange first thought, that he now knew why the outer aspect of the mansion had struck him as funereal.

“It is the most awful thing,” he murmured, and stood upright in the middle of the floor, not caring to take a seat. “Upon my word, I scarcely know how to believe it is true. To think that only last night she was sitting over there, hiding her face behind her fan, poor thing; and who knows what she was seeking to hide besides? For she was one of those women who would endure anything rather than pity; and if she was in pain—why, I have been a brute to be so hard upon her. I wonder if she was in pain! I feel ashamed to think of it all, if she was. But who was ever to know this was going to happen? Who would have guessed that the poor creature

would be dead and gone before another day came? Well, I'm glad we parted in peace. I am uncommonly glad we had no row of any sort; and no one now need ever know that she was not over-fond of me. I must try and forget it myself; and, by Jove! I will."

Then he paused, and took up the strain again.

"There's her davenport now—queer and strange it looks already. It was beastly of me to write that letter at it last night—I would not touch it with a pair of tongs to-day. What can have been the matter with her? She did not look the subject for heart complaint. No doubt it was the heart, though; and that made her more snappish than she need have been. Certainly she never would have been sweet. But nothing is so bad for the temper as anything wrong with the heart. . . . So Hartland's here. He got on better with her than anybody did. . . . Lady Julia will feel it. She's the right sort, is Julia. Lord, what a difference between those two! . . . It won't make much odds to the husband. Cicero's and Kant's stomachs will go on all the same. . . . Our marriage will have to wait a bit, I suppose. That won't be such a nuisance, as if—as it would have been. We shall be able to do pretty much as we please now, we two. . . . What an alteration this will make about the whole place! No one will know it soon. Well, it is ill speaking harm of the dead, else I must say"—and he drew a long, broad-chested breath—"I know how I feel, though I wouldn't put it into words for the world."

His reverie had barely been brought to this appropriate close, ere the door opened and Lord Hartland entered.

The two shook hands in silence.

Then Gilbert burst forth impetuously. "I never had such a shock in my life."

His companion nodded, and the two sat down.

"When did you hear?" asked the major next.

"Directly after breakfast. They had been trying to revive her for some time then."

"When do you suppose it took place?"

"Makin—that's our doctor—thinks, just before rising. The maids say she was still warm when they took her in hand, and they used all sorts of restoratives at once."

"With no effect?"

"Oh no; she had been dead before they began."

"Was her husband not on the spot? Was he no good?"

"Not at all. He was in his dressing-room—you know he is an early riser—and he thinks now he heard her call, but supposed at the time she was speaking to her maid. She had certainly striven to rise, for she was lying half across the bed."

"Has—have you seen Rosamund?" said Gilbert, next. "You know it was all settled between us yesterday, don't you? I was here till late last night."

"I heard it was all right," replied Lord Hartland, putting out his hand quietly. "This is rather rough on you; but you will help to comfort them all, Rosamund especially. She is with her aunt now."

"Shall—do you think I ought to go away?" inquired Gilbert, who had been asking the same question of himself for the last five minutes, without being able to answer it to his satisfaction. "Of course I am not a relation—I mean one of the family yet; and I should not like to intrude if—"

"Oh no," said Hartland, with a faint smile, "it could not be called intruding. You have a right to stay, and I should say my cousin would be disappointed if you left. She will see you presently."

"What is being done?"

"The usual things," and Hartland took up a paper-knife and played with it absently. After which, the two sat a long time in silence, gazing for relief into the fire.

"It is an awful thing," at last observed Gilbert.

It would be wrong to say that he enjoyed the awfulness, but certainly he had never supposed he could feel so easy, so comfortably solemn and subdued, as he now did in taking free possession of the large arm-chair—Mr. Liscard's own evening chair—and preparing to bear his part in whatever woeful contingencies should arise. What a blessed thing it was that he had actually spoken, and had had his affair settled! Had he delayed a single day, it might have been weeks before he could with decency have come forward; added to which, he could have had none of the melancholy distinction which he now foresaw, in wearing mourning for and attending the obsequies of the great lady. He would even have lost the honor of that morning's admission, and the sharing of Hartland's silent watch.

At present there was nothing more for either to do but to watch and wait. An unearthly hush pervaded the mansion; only now and again a door being closed with ostentatious deliberation betrayed the presence of other inmates; the servants were in their own wing; the children in their equally remote quarters; and all the other members of the family were gathered in the upper chambers.

All, wheresoever assembled, trod noiselessly, and spoke below their breaths. The reaction had not yet begun; and even the very little ones in the nursery were content with the novelty of being supplied with unusual toys and sweetmeats, and suffered themselves to be suppressed, and neglected.

"I suppose the arrangements will devolve on you?" said Gilbert, presently.

"I will give any help I can."

"The boys are too young to be much good."

"And the two eldest are at school."

"There is no one, then?"

"I fancy Mr. Liscard will be able to express his own wishes; and though I have not seen him yet, he knows *I am here, and can send for me when he chooses.*"

"The funeral can't well take place before the middle of the week."

"No."

Then another silence.

"I am glad I came over early," said Gilbert, nursing his knee reflectively. "This happened to be an easy day, and I was tempted."

"What o'clock is it now?"

"Not twelve yet. I meant to have had a walk or drive or something, and was here by half-past eleven. But now,"—and he dolefully shook his head.

At length Rosamund came down.

She had been weeping, poor child, and at sight of the two figures who rose respectfully to receive her, tears flowed afresh. Until a few hours ago she had never known death, and had had indeed but little to do with the realities of life. So terrible, so frightful a jar upon the even tenor of her days was not to be at once comprehended, and was scarcely to be looked upon but with horror and amazement. Her mother dead—gone forever—snatched away without a parting word or sign! The thing seemed too monstrous for belief; and almost as one in a dream, she had clung and wept, soothed by Lady Julia's expansive, wholesome, and very real sympathetic tribulation. It had been an effort to leave her, even to come down and meet her lover—and yet it had been something to have a lover to come to.

She had heard that Hartland was with Gilbert, and had well known how quickly the former would depart on her approach; and indeed he had instantly begun to consider how best to do so, when there was a tap at the door, which made all turn their heads. A tap at the door—at that door—at a door that never was, and never was meant to be, tapped upon!

What could it portend?

Only a housemaid entering with a message.

"Jane!" exclaimed her young lady, the moisture

frozen on her eyelids,—“*Jane!* what is the meaning of this?”

Jane saw her mistake. In the general disarrangement of everything, it had been agreeable to discharge an errand which was not in her ordinary round of duties, and she had felt secure of its passing unnoticed. She now looked foolish enough. “Mr. Badeley is out, miss, and William and John wasn’t in the servants’ hall nor pantry, and—”

“And you could not fetch them?” said Rosamund, in a tone that made the girl shrink. “How dare you? Go this instant, and never let such a thing occur again. The idea of her presuming!” she continued passionately, as the intruder vanished. “Just because—just because—she would as soon have thought of flying as doing such a thing yesterday. And now!” and her tears burst forth afresh. It had been the first signal of the change.

“I had better go and see what she came about, however,” said Hartland, making use of the notion. “One of us is wanted, I imagine.” And he left the room.

All that day he was very little to be seen, and yet his presence was felt everywhere.

Insensibly one and all came to lean on him for directions and suggestions, for Major Gilbert was still too much of a stranger to bear the part he would otherwise have done, and it was due to Lord Hartland that the principal benefit which could have been conferred on the mourning house came to it in the shape of Lady Julia, who took up her abode there—not altogether to please herself—for the first week.

“Rosamund ought to have you with her,” said Hartland.

“You mean because of her engagement?”

“Yes.”

“I did hope—I did hope—oh, my dear Hartland, is it really, absolutely, irremediably settled? Is there *no way out of it?* Must it be? The dear child was

always so impulsive, so impetuous ; and it all happened so rapidly that I had a kind of feeling as if this great loss might—" and she looked wistfully into his face. Somehow or other she had fancied that her sister dead might have been able to effect what living she had failed to do. "She was so set against it, poor, poor dear," she murmured.

He was silent ; he could not now say, as at another time he might and would have said, "unreasonably and foolishly set against it"; but neither would he acquiesce, nor hold out hopes which were most unlikely to be fulfilled.

"I am sure if the dear child wishes me to be here, I will stay," sighed Lady Julia, seeing this, "but it will be a painful, painful thing to do. If indeed you would come also?"

But that he could not do.

"My brother-in-law will not be always in his own rooms, will he?" was her next timorous inquiry.

"Your presence will draw him from them sooner than anything else."

"And—and—of course I will remain if you wish me to do so ; but I must have my Hannah—or no, old Charlotte would be better—and some clothes—and oh, dear, there will be the mourning to be seen to. And all those poor children's mourning also."

"You see you are really needed here, Aunt Julia."

"Well, my dear, well ; I don't say I am not," resignedly.

"Rosamund is too young to have the charge of everything."

"Much, much too young."

"And she has her own prospects to think of too."

Lady Julia groaned. Then out it all came again. "I can not like this Major Gilbert. I care not what he has, or can offer. He is not worthy of her. He can never become *one of us*. While you—"

"While I?" said Hartland, with a smile, as she stopped short. "You think I should have done

better for my cousin?" he continued, after a moment.

"A hundred thousand times better. And had he not come across her path just now, and had she not, as it were, been driven to him by—oh, I know, I see how it was. But for that, she could, she would, she must have loved you!"

Was it fancy, or did she see a strange expression pass over his face as she spoke?

He did not answer her. He did not speak again for some time.

At length he roused himself abruptly, as was his wont after concluding a matter in his own mind. "Look here, aunt: it is not for me to dictate to you, but I will tell you plainly what my own feelings are about Major Gilbert. It is nothing to me, and ought to be nothing, that, as a companion, he is not strictly to my taste. He does not suit me; but what of that? It appears he suits Rosamund; and it is surely better that she should marry a man made of good sterling stuff, even although he be not pre-eminently a gentleman, than a fool with any amount of polish on the surface?"

"But all men are not either boors or fools?" plaintively murmured she.

But she was not to get out her say.

"It is useless to expect that such a girl as Rosamund will not choose for herself," pursued Hartland, looking steadily in front of him. "Major Gilbert is quite the sort of hero to take her fancy.

"Hero? Oh, I had forgotten!" and Lady Julia's eyelids dropped again. "Dear, dear! what an age ago that seems! Certainly we ought not to forget that good deed."

"It has come down to being a 'good deed,' has it?"

"But, then, I never dreamed of this to follow."

"Would that have altered your opinion?"

"My opinion is, that he ought never to have

allowed himself to think of entering our family," averred the high-born spinster, with sudden asperity. "I must say that I do like people to know their places; and I must say, too, Hartland, that, knowing all you know, I think it was hardly kind," and her poor voice quavered with the unwonted accusation, "hardly quite fair, or kind of you, to be on his side."

"My dear aunt, he never asked me to be on his side; as a matter of fact, I was not—perhaps I am not particularly on his side now,—but it is nothing to him whether I am or no. He fell in love with my cousin, without saying 'By your leave' to any one; and it was only when it was patent to all that she—she cared for him in return, that it seemed to me that they were both being hardly dealt with."

"But you certainly spoke of him with admiration the other day?"

"So did you"; and he half smiled.

"But you went on after you knew of this; after Rosamund had sent over the news, last night."

"Which at once checkmated your enthusiasm. But you see, ma'am, somehow it did not act so spontaneously on mine. I admire Gilbert as much as I ever did; I admire his pluck and nerve, his self-reliance and self-devotion. I think he did a thing that day which only a fellow who was in many respects—and substantial respects—a fine fellow, could have done. And I honor Rosamund," he added slowly, "for having the courage to see this, and value at his true worth a downright, straightforward soldier, who will do his best to make her happy. She is above minding his small, trifling deficiencies. She sets us all an example. I, for one, am resolved to profit by it. In the light in which she sees her future husband, I too will look upon him, and," he added emphatically, "I will look upon him in no other."

"Well, I shall never like him; but I will suffer him," conceded the unfortunate Lady Julia, with the air of a martyr.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE REACTION BEGINS.

"But some so like to thorns or nettles live,
That none for them can, when they perish, grieve."

—WALLER.

NO one ever hinted that Lady Caroline's untimely end had any connection with her daughter's engagement, although news of the two events got abroad at the same time. It was not to be supposed that her austere nature could have been seriously disturbed by ordinary emotions; and that emotions extraordinary had been induced was of course a secret confined to the initiated few. But even the home circle at King's Common, and the two who were almost a part of it at the Abbey—even these, who had been witnesses of her discomfiture, and had marked its rise and progress, were unaware of the depth to which the iron had entered the proud woman's soul.

They were now ready to feel sure that she had been failing for some time past, and one could adduce one little instance, one another, which had not been noticed at the time, but which, in the new light thrown upon everything, started to memory, and gave support to the welcome supposition. Lady Julia was happily positive that her poor dear suffering sister had been misjudged throughout her life by reason of the infirmities caused by this secret malady; while Rosamund was equally fortunate in her divination that her mother's attitude toward Major Gilbert had been the outcome of this same internal martyrdom. It had chafed her spirit and blinded her vision, causing her to look upon *everything and everybody* with jaundiced eyes. Poor mam-

ma ! And Lady Caroline was forgiven and compassionated, and reverently made allowance for on all hands.

Gilbert alone in his heart knew better. As soon as the first softening influences of the shock had passed away, and he could dispassionately look the catastrophe in the face, the instinctive conviction gained upon him that deep-seated mortification, a sense of defeat, trouble, and wrath which could find no outlet, had hastened her ladyship's demise. The force and weight and hopelessness of the evil had been more than that proud and stubborn spirit could bear ; and debarred from every source of consolation, and consumed with a bitterness of disappointment of which the world must perceive nothing, the moment had been too favorable for an insidious malady not to seize upon for an attack, beneath which she had sunk unresistingly.

Thus, while Lady Julia, Hartland, Rosamund, and all who were charitably disposed toward the dead, attributed her mental and spiritual shortcomings to a physical cause, Gilbert changed the order of precedence; and Gilbert was in the right. It was—it had been—as he thought.

“ To think that she should actually have gone and died out of spite ! Upon my word,” quoth he to himself, as he sat with lugubrious visage in a mourning-coach—“ upon my word, we are well quit of her.” And such being his rumination, it is not to be wondered at that he was not quite so happy in his demeanor nor observations as he might have been that day. Up till then he had got on very well ; but the funeral over, his spirits rose, and, do what he would, he continually forgot not to be cheerful, nor to move about with too brisk a step.

Now, to the youthful Rosamund, with all the redundancy of vigorous life glowing in her veins, this first great check which it had ever met was, from the very fact of its being the first, gigantic in the magnitude of its proportions.

We grow on easier terms with sorrow as we advance in years.

But to the very young, the presence of a first death is in itself a fearful and appalling thing ; and when, through the advent of the grim destroyer, the ruling spirit of the place is laid low, and the irrevocable deed makes itself felt in all that is said and done, and in every circumstance, however slight, of daily life, there is apt to be an exaggeration of the manifestation of woe ; a feeling as if it were hardly right to move, to stir, to occupy the dreary hours in any way ; to open a book, unless it be a devout one ; or broach a topic, unless it have reference to the passing scene.

Accordingly, the poor child, and indeed all the poor children, did their best to act up to the prescribed formula. Catherine, who was by nature prone to display, flourished her black-edged handkerchief, drew down the corners of her mouth, and settled with herself that speech of every kind was unbecoming. Dolly, who was of another mold, easily affected to what her brothers, brother-like, denominated "blubbering," having "blubbered" at every point of the proceedings, more especially at meal-times—being incited thereto by an extra performance of her sister's handkerchief—was now able, from sheer weakness, to rain tears at nothing. The little ones naturally followed the lead thus given ; were more unhappy in their enforced holiday than they had ever been in lesson hours ; hated the dark house and the drawn-down blinds ; and construed a general sense of misery and discomfort into grief for a mother whom otherwise they would hardly have missed.

In sorrow far more real herself, their tender-hearted aunt would fain have sought to cheer and comfort,—but unfortunately she had taken a severe cold almost immediately after her installation at King's Common, lost her voice, and been finally obliged to keep to bed. Never was a good soul more *ashamed of herself* ; and although far from being the

useless burden, by which term she reproached herself, it is certain that the reed on which Hartland had meant his young cousin to lean was for the nonce a broken one. There was now no one to do anything for anybody.

"I never saw more unfortunate small fry," muttered Gilbert to himself. "It is too bad that no one does a thing to sprighten them up; and though they have been bullied and trodden down all their lives by a woman who ought never to have been a mother at all, they are taught now to look as if it would be a sin ever to smile again because she is gone."

"Let's have the children down," said he to Rosamund, suddenly.

"Down!" exclaimed she, in surprise. "Where?"

"Here, in the drawing-room. I dare say they are feeling bad, and it was hard on them to be hustled out of sight the moment we come home from the funeral. Let's all sit round the fire and tell stories, and chirp the poor things up a bit."

If he had only put the suggestion differently! She tried to think it was kind and thoughtful; but as it now stood, it seemed almost a profanation of the day.

"He never liked poor mamma," she said to herself. "But still Frederick should hardly have talked of 'the funeral' in that tone to me. I dare say he did not mean it. I am sure he did not know how it sounded; but—I wish he had not."

"Well, shall I go and fetch them?" inquired he, innocently.

Rosamund hesitated. "It is not their time for being in the drawing-room. I think perhaps Miss Penrose would be surprised by their being sent for now."

"Surprised! You don't mean to say they are doing lessons? By Jove!"

"Certainly not," said Rosamund quickly, while a gleam of displeasure shot from her eye. "How could you suppose it?"

"I did not suppose it; I thought it hardly credible; but I must say I have seen so much that has astonished me about your mother's ways with the children—"

"— Frederick!"

He hastened to apologize. "It is my ignorance, of course, Rosamund. Why, how is it likely I should know? I have never been in the way of youngsters. I dare say I should have spoiled them awfully if I had."

"I am sure you would," rejoined she, only half appeased. "And of course you can not understand. Children have to be subject to rules and hours. It was the same with me when I was under Miss Penrose, yet no one ever said I was hardly dealt with."

"The old story of the foxes and their tails," quoth he jocularly. "As Miss Rosamund Liscard had her tail cut short, so must Miss Catherine and Miss Dolly, and all the rest of the misses. But come, I don't altogether see it. Why should the poor things not have better times now—?"

"Oh, *don't*," exclaimed Rosamund, as if he had stung her.

It was but a little thing; but he was always saying, always doing such like little things. The night before he had hurt her thus.

The fire had been hot at his back, as the three sat at dinner—he, she, and his future father-in-law. By the side of the fender there stood a little screen, one of Lady Caroline's own peculiar little comforts, which had invariably been drawn out between her ladyship's chair and the fireplace. It had now been left folded reverently. No one had dreamed of using it, until Gilbert, all unwittingly, had risen, spread the leaf as he had often seen it spread upon the hearth rug, and resumed his seat.

She had said nothing, could say nothing; but had experienced a glow of shame, an undefined sensation, which was, *alas!* to prove but the faint forerunner of many such.

No one had ever expected from the bold soldier refined perceptions or quick sensibilities ; if Rosamund had been asked, she would probably have answered that whether he possessed them or not was a matter of indifference to her—but in the present circumstances he was certainly unlucky, since no one could have known less how to adapt himself to them.

He now proceeded to blunder on.

"I meant no harm, I am sure," he protested ; "but you must own yourself, my dear girl, that it has been a dull day for the poor things ; and of course they can not settle to anything this afternoon ; and bless me ! it's only three o'clock : whatever will they do with themselves till tea-time ? It is raining hard, so they can't go out and run about."

"I should think not—to-day."

"Well, I only vex you, so I will say no more," rejoined Gilbert good-humoredly. "You must forgive me, Rosamund, there's a dear little thing," and he put his arm round her with something of a deprecating embrace ; "I am sure I am downright sorry ever to have mentioned the subject, for I would not do anything to annoy you for the world."

Then all at once the clouds dispersed, the brow cleared, and she would herself fetch the brothers and sisters, and tell them how kind and how good he had been to think of them thus in their adversity.

No, she would not be put off going. She had been stupid, and cross, and unkind, and he could only show that he forgave her for being so, by now letting her be herself the messenger to the little doleful party in the school-room. They would, they must be unhappy, of course ; and poor Miss Penrose was doubtless having a trying time keeping the peace between one and another ; it would be a real charity to relieve the over-weighted governess of her burden for a time ; and away she flew, cheered in spite of herself by her own restored faith and affection, and thinking, poor child,

how sweet it was to have to own herself wrong, and her master and lover right.

Of course there was astonishment and rejoicing in the dull, dreary room when so welcome and so unusual a summons was announced.

Catherine and Dolly, who were severally in disgrace on the same count, were pardoned on the spot; and all were swiftly dismissed in search of soap and water and brushes, preparatory to so important an event as entering the drawing-room at that hour.

"Frederick has sent for you, and says he will tell you a story," had been the delightful message, at which even Catherine had brightened up; and Dolly, every tear dried as if by magic, had jumped to her feet in ecstasy,—so that even the whispered admonition not to be noisy and not to laugh too loud, which the full-grown sister thought it incumbent on her to add, scarcely sufficed to overcloud their outburst of sunshine.

After they had gone, Rosamund lingered a moment. She was fain to have still more gratitude and appreciation on Gilbert's behalf. It seemed to her that her churlish response to his most innocent and well-intentioned overture had been so uncalled-for and ungracious that she could do no less than make her present approval of it and of him known as widely as might be.

"Major Gilbert is so fond of children," she began, "that he could not bear to think of the poor little things feeling lonely and wretched; and of course, Miss Penrose, they can not be expected to understand all they have lost, so that there can be no harm in their being—being comforted a little, can there? Of course, Major Gilbert will keep them *quite* quiet." (Gilbert had had no notion of doing so, although he might possibly be depended upon to "hush-hush" at intervals, if the giggles threatened to penetrate too far.) "It must be so very miserable for them," pleaded Rosamund, who, in truth, needed only to plead with herself.

She alone, in her heart of hearts, cared to be honestly mourning for the dead. For the rest, the decorous outward demonstrations of woe sufficed, now that the first shock had gone by ; and Miss Penrose, who had conformed with the utmost rigor to these in public, had been conscious of slipping "Vanity Fair" under the fold of her dress, and hastily withdrawing her feet from the fender, so as not to look too comfortable, when Rosamund's voice had been heard in the doorway. From her no demurs need certainly have been feared.

"Indeed, I quite agree with you, and think it only too kind and considerate of Major Gilbert," quoth she now, promptly. "I hope the children will not be troublesome. He must send them back directly he is tired of them. They have been a little trying to-day—"

"So Major Gilbert thought—I mean, he thought that very likely they might be, and that you would be glad to have them taken off your hands—"

"Oh, indeed ! And he thought of me too ? Really too kind" ("and like a perfect gentleman," thought the little governess in her heart). "Pray thank Major Gilbert on my behalf, and with my compliments, Rosamund," desirous of rising to the occasion.

"It is such a sad day for us all," murmured Rosamund.

"Yes, indeed," murmured Miss Penrose, in unison. She could not help feeling as if she had been somehow pulled up, and the faint light faded out of her face—for she perceived that it would not do to be brisk, even in praise of Gilbert, just yet.

"The poor children," sighed the elder sister.

"Poor little things," echoed the governess.

Bang went a door without, followed by a suppressed peal of laughter, scuffling of feet, and an evident scrimmage.

"What a noise they are making !" cried Rosamund, with a frown ; and she was hastily proceeding to quell

it, when the entrance of the little band, all soaped and shining, and glad with expectation, brought about a kindlier intent. No, she would not be sharp with them, nor expect too much of them, that day. Their little rejoicing countenances should speak for Gilbert, and applaud him. They should tell himself, moreover, that he was well with her, approved of by her, and sustained by her in all he did at this time ; and even now, alas !—a vague, intangible something whispered that this assurance was needed.

"Come along," and Rosamund smiled upon the group. "Come along, and don't make a noise in the passage. Remember the servants. They would be shocked to hear you speak, you know—"

"Oh, *we* won't speak, we don't want to speak. He's to speak," cried one little voice.

"He's going to tell us a story," added another.

"About lions, I hope ?" in a boy's determined accents.

"And tigers, and camels, and elephanks," in that of another and smaller male.

"Elephanks !" tittered all the elder ones.

Rosamund was glad to get them off : she was dangerously near tittering herself.

Even Miss Penrose was with difficulty subduing a cheerful countenance ; and for the sake of decorum it was well that the scene had not been of more than a minute's duration, ere the door had closed, and she was left to the unaccustomed luxury of solitude.

It had been, as we know, Lady Caroline's code that, lessons or not, Miss Penrose should be on duty at all times and seasons—should be felt, should be in the background, should be there. There was to be no escape for her, no freedom for her subjects ; no relaxation for the one, no chance of self-discipline for the others. And the consequences ? Rosamund was the first consequence—and with her only we have to do.

But no one knew better the folly and short-sighted-

ness of the former scheme of life at King's Common than the worthy preceptress herself ; and any augury of a change was hailed by her with a most appreciative readiness. In excellent humor, therefore, she now hastened to her own apartment, there to pour forth the full, feverish, and underlined account of the two great events of the week, to those of her particular friends for whom she had not had time hitherto.

It is not often given to any one to have two such pieces of intelligence as an unexpected engagement and a sudden death to relate at one and the same time, and perhaps the chilly little woman appreciated her luck all the more that news of any kind was hard to get in that secluded domain ; at any rate she felt now quite revived and animated by her pleasant task, and we may be sure that the gallant officer, to whose kindness and consideration she owed the opportunity for discharging it, did not suffer at her hands. He had another claim, moreover, on her notice.

His rescue in the mill-dam, preceding, as it did, his offer only by twenty-four hours, had a right to be included in her programme. Never in her life had so much and varied material been provided for her epithets in so brief a period.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I WHO STOOD UP FOR HIM SO BRAVELY ONCE!"

"In the heart's attachment a woman never likes a man with ardor, till she has suffered for his sake."—SHERIDAN.

"BUT is it not the strangest thing?" cried the Gilberts, one to another, when the first shock of the second announcement had subsided. "It really is the very strangest thing." And it rather added to than diminished the zest with which they gave out Frederick's projected alliance, that the sudden death of the titled mother of his *fiancée* had been the first and immediate result of it.

"No doubt she was overcome altogether, poor woman," cried the soft-hearted Mrs. Gilbert, very much overcome herself by the idea. "Yes, indeed, 'tis too true, Maria," to an old neighbor and friend who had dropped in, as people did drop in all day long at the Gilberts', always secure of a welcome, and of the best of cake and wine, or tea, as the hour might be—"yes, indeed, poor Lady Caroline! Will you not take off your bonnet, Maria, and stop a bit to comfort us? Now do. That's right. But you won't take off your bonnet? Though, to be sure, you do look so nice in that bonnet, 'twould be a pity. And the room is not too hot for you? Mr. Gilbert and myself, we are getting to be old people, and we like large fires. Yes, to be sure, poor Lady Caroline! Emily, my dear, just say, to let no one else in this afternoon, being as it is the funeral day," in explanation to her visitor; "and ask them to let us have tea by four o'clock, Emily,—I seem to need my tea to-day; and, Emily, if there are any muffins to be had,

just tell them to get some—though I doubt if it isn't too early yet for muffins. However, they can try. Yes, indeed, poor Lady Caroline ! And the marriage so agreeable to us all, and so satisfactory. But it's in my mind that it was just too much for the poor thing. An eldest daughter is an eldest daughter, say what you will about there being plenty left ; and 'twill be the first break in the family. The girls may talk as they please, but when they come to be as old as I am, they'll know what it is to have feelings. It's in my bones that Lady Caroline's feelings were too much for her."

"Delicate, no doubt," assented Maria. "The aristocracy, as a rule, are delicate ; so sensitive, there's no saying where to have them. And no doubt it was a great excitement ; and Lady Caroline would, as you say, have her feelings."

"Ah yes, Maria."

"Girls little think of all their mothers have to go through. It's all very well for them," proceeded Maria ; "they think it mighty fine to be off with their gay bridegrooms—"

—"Ah yes, Maria."

"But it's those left behind who know what the parting means," and Maria looked solemnly round ; "they are the ones to be pitied," said she.

"Indeed it's true, Maria. Ah, dear," quoth Mrs. Gilbert, taking up the ball again, "they little think, as you say, Maria. My son tells me Lady Caroline was anything but stout," added she, more briskly,—"anything but stout, he said. Tall and thin, he described her ; so what it could have been that was the matter with a person who was tall and thin—for of course *something* besides the feelings there must have been—I can't imagine. At first, said I, it must have been a fit ; for you know there's no saying who will or who won't have fits ; and I knew a lady, and I think you will remember her by name—Jane Tarvey, I mean,—who married a thin, lanky, pale-faced, long-

fingered man, and he died of a cramp! Cramp is a dangerous complaint when you can't get at it; so may be it was the cramp. And—"

"You never heard of the death till after you had written about the engagement?"

"No, indeed, or we should not have sent the letters we did; and of course we should not have written to the poor thing herself—I mean her ladyship—at all. Little did we know we were addressing a corpse! We were all in a hurry to write. For the girls were so pleased; and as we heard the family was a thought stiff and punctilious—not easy folks like ourselves—we just sat down all of us then and there, that Frederick might have nothing to complain of. And there,—to think of it, Maria,—at the very time we were writing 'Dear Lady Caroline,' was she lying stark and cold, and would never get her own letter!"

"And now, I suppose you have had to write again," said Maria. "'Tis a strange affair from beginning to end."

"Is it not?" cried Henrietta, with all the importance of being mixed up in it. "The strangest affair. You must know, Mrs. Timmins, that we had been on the look-out for this, for Frederick had confided in us girls directly he got father's consent; so then, Emily and I were on the tiptoe every time the post came in till we saw his hand. He said it would have perhaps come off even sooner than it did but for an adventure he had had—but he did not tell us what the adventure was."

"I dare say he had come near breaking his neck, or something," placidly put in Mrs. Gilbert. "He is as venturesome as ever he was, is Frederick; and he will drive those nasty tandems—"

"Anyway, he was all right when he wrote, mother; and wasn't it good of him to write off the very day, and of her to put in a postscript too, Mrs. Timmins? Father has the letter locked up; and he is having his nap now, or I would get it for you to see. He said

it had only just come off, and was all right, and he was a 'lucky dog,' and was 'as happy as a king.'"

"Ay, that was it. Frederick all over," nodded Mrs. Gilbert, beaming again. "Well, all I can say is, though he is my son, she is a lucky woman who gets him."

"Well, she wrote ever so nice a postscript," said Emily.

"Saying she hoped we should be fond of her, and that she was sure she should be fond of us," added Etta.

"Ay, to be sure, those were her very words"—it was again Mrs. Gilbert's turn—"her very words, Maria; and there is no doubt we should have had her and the girls as thick as thieves directly. But there, they must wait for that, now."

"Was he in the house when—when the death took place?" inquired Mrs. Timmins.

"No, it was in the night," replied his mother, with infinite solemnity and enjoyment. "In the night. Toward the morning. Ah! At the turn of the night, as they call it. That's the time they go, mostly. Poor Lady Caroline!"

"Come, now, mother, there's no need to go on any more about 'poor Lady Caroline,' making us all melancholy," here suggested Miss Emily. "Let's think about the wedding and all that. When can it be, I wonder?"

"People are not so strict about mourning as they used to be," quoth Mrs. Timmins sagely; "a year at most—"

"La! a year!" cried Emily. "Why, what ever are you thinking of, dear? A year!"

"Oh, we couldn't wait a year, you know,—we really couldn't," added Henrietta. "Besides, it is not done now among fashionable people. Six months perhaps,—and she broke off sorrowfully, for even six months seemed an age to wait, when before they had contemplated—taught by their brother—six weeks at the latest.

Well, I don't pretend to be fashionable," retorted Mrs. Timmins, with some pique, "I hope I know what's proper and becoming. One need not to be fashionable to pay decent respect to the dead ; and though I am only a plain person—"

But she was not to be allowed to call herself a plain person.

"Now, Maria, don't you go and think the girls meant anything of that kind," cried Mrs. Gilbert, as peacemaker. "They wouldn't think of such a thing as your not knowing about the fashions as well as anybody. But they are regularly upset, poor things, and no wonder. When you and I were girls, ways were different, and—"

"And an engagement was just an engagement," said Maria, "and young people were engaged, and there was an end of it for many a day. There was no running and flying to be married ; especially when, as often as not, there was little or nothing to marry upon, and when—"

"But, you see, that is not the case with Mr. Gilbert's son," interrupted Mr. Gilbert's wife, with an elation which it was impossible to refrain from showing. "Papa has come down more than handsomely. I really am surprised myself at papa's liberality. The young folks need wait for nothing, and want for nothing."

"I know Frederick had meant the marriage to be at once," added Henrietta.

"Through papa," subjoined her mother.

"He spoke of Christmas," further informed Emily.

"Ay, we had Christmas in our minds, all of us," said her mother ; "and if the wedding had come off a week or so before, we could have had a real nice Christmas gathering, and made a great occasion of it. Isn't it a pity now ? There is papa so well, with less trouble in his joints than he has had for years, and myself pretty hearty too. I declare it does seem a thousand pities,"—and she could almost have found

it in her honest heart to be indignant with her new connection that should have been, whom fate had transformed into such a marplot and killjoy.

It would have been so dearly to her mind to have had a brave Christmas merry-making for her bonnie bride and bridegroom ; the whole house agog with fires, and fumes, and feasting ; her comely board bubbling over with good things, and rare wines from the innermost recesses of the cellar on the sideboard.

Many a splendid gift and many a choice hint would have been delightedly bestowed, neighbors would have been by scores presented to the bride, and the bride would have been trotted far and near, from house to house, in return. Frederick should have seen that his old mother was not so old yet.

And now the luckless Lady Caroline had spoiled all.

Not only had the dame of quality upset every scheme for present enjoyment, but she had even robbed the future of half its gilding. To say nothing of the festive season having gone ere the nuptials could now be consummated, it would not be the thing—not the thing at all, as the poor woman sadly owned, with tears in her eyes—to make of the affair the overflowing jollification it should have been, had nothing happened.

Of all Major Gilbert's family, she was the one most to be pitied.

Em and Etta could still look forward to being bridesmaids and conjure up visions of future visits to King's Common, and even derive some comfort from the thought that these need be no longer such formidable and doubtful pleasures now that the great lady, who had even awed Frederick himself, and who would indubitably have frightened them out of their wits, was no longer there ; but poor Mrs. Gilbert, who was too old for new sights and scenes, and who had composed her excuse for not attending the wedding, even before her son had informed her of the engagement,—the poor lady, whose imagination had merely radiated

among the flesh-pots at home, felt herself defrauded of her all.

"We must just make the best of it, Maria," in the end she concluded; "but I do say, let those deny it who will, 'tis a mysterious dispensation, and a most afflicting one all round"; and probably there was no one present who doubted the sincerity of her woe, or failed to divine its true cause.

Let us now return to the neighborhood of King's Common; but before we once more approach that smitten household, still numb beneath its terrible experience, let us take a peep into another, a lesser, and a brighter home.

A brother and sister were together in a snug little parlor, each occupied in his and her several way, when suddenly the latter, whose business was not of an absorbing nature, in that it consisted of some mild family mending, raised her head, and thus delivered herself of the outcome of the previous half-hour's meditation.

"Jack, are you not going to call upon the Liscards?"

"Certainly."

"When? I thought you would have done so by this time."

"I will do it very soon."

"A clergyman usually calls the day after the funeral."

No response.

"The funeral was yesterday."

Still no response.

"I think you ought to call at King's Common to-morrow." But as even this very direct suggestion provoked neither assent nor refusal, the rector's active-minded little sister and prompter decided within herself to push the subject no further at present. Jack was busy, his hands were full of papers, and his nose was buried in the same; he was probably thinking of his sermon—Lady Caroline's funeral sermon, which all the parish would come to hear, and which

it would be no easy matter to preach—he must not be worried with other and more sublunary affairs.

She was a very thoughtful and intelligent little person, this Miss Clemmy, and confined herself to her own sphere in a way that was quite surprising for a parson's daughter and a parson's sister ; so that, although it might appear from the above that she was in the habit of whipping up her brother to the post of duty, it needed but half an hour's discourse with the fond and faithful little creature, or indeed but half a minute's look into her honest little face, to set all fears at rest for Jack. He had brought her there to be his little comforter, his little counselor, and his little trotter round the cottages—each of which three functions she performed to admiration. His comfort was the study of her life, his honor and glory the sunshine of it. They were all in all to each other.

It has probably been forgotten that the rector of Hartland-on-the-Hill had been a boyish friend of the young earl, and that soon after his own succession to the title, Hartland had been able to offer Mr. Stoneby the living. The small, rural, and somewhat isolated parish was exceptionally lucky in its having been accepted. For many, such a place would have had but few attractions ; but Stoneby's health was not robust, and he was possessed of a small independence. He therefore had neither the desire for heavier work, nor the need for a larger stipend. He had, moreover, come to Hartland to look after its spiritual interests, and he did not consider that these were sufficiently discharged by his being in his pulpit of a Sunday. He meant to know his people, and to live among them ; to teach the ignorant, strengthen the weak, hold out a hand to the falling, recover the lost. That his old friend Dick Verelst, now become the Earl of Hartland and a great man, dwelt hard by, had not been allowed to rank as an inducement when considering the offer ; but once it had been upon other grounds conscientiously accepted, he had allowed him

self delightful prognostications of walks and talks, with not a few kindly and wily resolutions for turning to the advantage of his flock those affectionate feelings which he knew were cherished toward himself.

The result had been completely successful. Hartland had indeed become by degrees so much attached to the society of both brother and sister, that Lady Caroline had grown to lift her eyebrows and Lady Julia to prick up her ears—poor anxious dears—if he did but take over a pheasant or a hare to the rectory. Neither of them had been at all sorry for unconscious little Clemmy's absence during the latter part of the past summer, though it had been caused by illness in the family, and had been a real trouble to Jack. "He must just learn to get on without her. He must take a wife," Lady Julia had decided, cheerfully.

Clemmy, however, had now returned, having been away during the entire period when all eyes had been fixed on Rosamund and Major Gilbert, and, in consequence, she now knew of the engagement, without understanding the general attitude toward it.

She was immensely interested. There are certain people to whom an engagement, be it what it may, must infallibly be interesting, even if those most concerned in it have no especial claims to notice; but Rosamund—Rosamund, with her wild vagaries and rebellious beauty; Rosamund, who knew no laws, owned no ruler, and sent wisdom to the winds, yet who was so young and sweet, and had had so miserable an upbringing—Rosamund was a sort of queen in Clementina's eyes, and her happiness a thing whereon to muse and ponder.

She pictured it all to herself; conjured up the past; wondered where the two had first met, and what the effect of each had been on the other; drew in her mind's eye a portrait of that conjunction of the brave, manly soldier and the bewitching maid. How delightful! how romantic! He, mute, confounded,

adoring ; she, transported and enthralled ! delicious !

Could she now but steal one glance—only glance,—have but one actual vision whereon to fresh castles in the air ? No, not yet ; she could go to King's Common yet, and it was at King's mon only that the enchanting play was going on. Jack could go, and Jack must and should,—a was this reflection, still more than the fact that the day after the funeral, which induced the queen "Are you not going to call on the Liscards ?"

After a time Jack looked round.

"What did you say about the Liscards ?" inquired he absently. "You were not thinking of going were you ?"

"No, not I ; but you. I could not go yet they will expect you."

"Who will expect me ? Whom am I to ask ?"

"Rosamund, of course."

"And suppose Major Gilbert is there ?"

"Which he is certain to be. Well ?"

"I should feel foolish. It is not pleasant to wound yourself up to perform a duty, and—"

"Wound yourself up ! But why 'wound' ? What is there about an ordinary call at King's mon to—"

"This is not an ordinary call."

"You need not say anything."

"Of course I shall not say anything. But ! However, I shall have to go, I suppose. You think I could ask for Mr. Liscard ?"

"He would never see you."

"Just what I hoped."

"Then you would have to ask for Rosamund all."

There was no escape for him ; and as he had of his sister's desire to know whether or not *en* people looked and behaved like ordinary *mon* was certainly hard that she could not have s

his stead. But this could not be. Rosamund had never made a friend of Clementina, and had, indeed, opened wide her eyes at the bare suggestion.

"Would not Miss Stoneby be better than the Waterfields?" Hartland had put forth on one occasion.

She had laughed outright.

"Your mother would not see it?"

She had nodded.

"Not good enough, eh?"

Not "good" at all, according to Lady Caroline's ideas of "goodness," he had been enlightened. What? People who could not tell to what family they belonged, or, indeed, if they belonged to any family at all? Could it be supposed that a Miss Stoneby, who might be a Miss Anybody, could possibly consort, that was to say consort in any but the slightest and most superficial manner, with a daughter of Lady Caroline Liscard?

All of this in Rosamund's best sarcasm. But she had presently dropped it, and spoken like herself.

"At the same time, Hartland, it is not altogether mamma; I own I am not drawn to swear a friendship with Clemmy Stoneby on my own account. My soul does not knit itself to hers. I do not dislike her—oh no. I see her to be good, and amiable, and busy, and useful—but—"

"Come on," said he. But—?"

"She is very, very old," said Rosamund seriously.

"Old? She is not twenty-one—"

"Oh, I know—not in that way old; not in age—but she never, *never* could have been a girl like me. She never could have got into scrapes, and muddles, and all the rest of the hot water—now, could she, Hartland? I can never think of her—no, not if I think of her at two feet high—but as engaging servants, adding up accounts, paying her weekly bills with her little basket on her arm, inquiring after absentees from her Sunday-class, and being bobbed to by a dozen in a row, whenever she stops to admonish

one. If I do but walk half a mile with her, it is, 'Oh, just let me look in here,' or 'I just want to run in there,' at every cottage-door we pass; and all with so business-like and competent an air, that I feel as if she had been ages and ages going in and out of cottages, and bustling along the rectory road."

"You have hit her off, undoubtedly."

"With a little round bonnet just fitting her face."

"I know it."

"And woolen mittens over her gloves, because of her chilblains."

"True to life. Both mittens and chilblains."

"And it does make a person old never to be young, Hartland?"

"I dare say."

"You 'dare say.' Well, I do call it hard to be 'dare sayed,' after all. Can you not think of something to say, not to 'dare' to say? Can't you suggest something, anything on the other side?"

But he had been wise not to do this. Unopposed she was nearly certain to work out for herself the neglected argument, whereas contradiction would have scattered it to the winds. Oh, if others could but have understood that willful nature as well!

It did not surprise the young man at all to find a kinder and friendlier feeling toward his *protégés* spring up after this encounter. At King's Common the brother and sister were looked upon as his *protégés*, and had the two both been men, they would have been held in excellent favor in consequence; but, as we have said, Lady Caroline held that plain and dowdy, or fair and fine, a young woman was still a young woman, and that Hartland was just a little too often over at the rectory.

In consequence, the Stonebys had never advanced in intimacy, and Mr Liscard's occasional "I wonder why we don't see more of the rector," had led to no results. They were now to come to the front by force of circumstances.

To every person, as to everything under the sun, there is a season, a time when, for the nonce, he or she attains an elevation and importance, even though it be of an artificial or an evanescent nature, and the mere shuffling of the cards in every-day existence at times throws up the hidden ones to the surface.

Thus it was now the Stonebys' hour.

The visit reluctantly undertaken by the brother, and anxiously urged by the sister, proved such a success that he could not but go again when pressed by all to do so. He went the next day, and the next ; and when he took Clementina also on the second occasion, the two were quite hailed in by the servants, who had marked how willingly any diversion was received in the great, dreary drawing-room of the mourning mansion.

That Major Gilbert was already there with Miss Rosamund was nothing ; he had come over early and been with her most of the day ; added to which, if the lovers had cared about being interrupted, they would not have been sitting in an apartment into which any one might walk at any moment. There they were known to be when the door-bell rang, and there the visitors were forthwith ushered in.

Gilbert, it appeared, was quite at home. Instead of the uneasy attitudes and restless movements which he had been wont to exhibit in that chamber of horrors, and instead of sitting edgeways on the formal central ottoman full in the draught betwixt two doors, he now either lolled easily on Lady Caroline's own couch by the fire, or exchanged it for the broad, low, pillowed arm-chair which Mr. Liscard still claimed in the evening.

On the entrance of Mr. Stoneby and his sister, he rose, with an air of rising to do the honors, met them half-way, poked the fire, pressed them to draw within the precincts, moved a table out of Clementina's way, and finally subsided again into the low chair, laid his head back, crossed his legs, and twirled his watch-

chain. Ease and intimacy could not have been carried to a finer pitch.

"Chilly to-day," he observed presently, with a comfortable yawn. "We have got into 'chill October' at last, and no mistake. How the leaves are dropping!"

"But there is so much evergreen to be seen from this window that the dropping leaves are scarcely observable," replied Miss Stoneby.

"Oh, ain't they, though!" rejoined Gilbert. "When I came up by one of the garden-paths this morning, I could hardly find my way. Give you my word, I lost it ever so often."

"You came through the woods, I suppose?"

"I did—more fool I! Never saw such mud in my life. Though I turned up my trousers—and, by George! I've forgotten to turn them down again!" and he did it before her very eyes.

("What a very—" but the lady hesitated to know what adjective to use. Instinctively she glanced at Rosamund, but Rosamund was busily talking, and saw nothing. "Dear me! I hope he is a well-mannered man," reflected Clementina, rather doubtfully.)

Then Gilbert yawned again, turned his head around on the chair-pillow, and addressed his betrothed:

"Rosamund, I thought you would like to see some letters I am expecting by the second post, so I told Netley to send over one of his men to the barracks about now. My servant will give them to him."

But Rosamund was still talking to Mr. Stoneby.

"Two posts a day are a nuisance, to my mind," continued the speaker (for, a dozen years ago, few rural neighborhoods had their second post): "I, for one, could do jolly well without dose number two in one day; could not you, Miss Stoneby?"

"I must confess I always go or send for mine," owned she. "We do not have them delivered; but we can get our afternoon letters by sending to the post-office. Most of my interesting letters come in the afternoon."

"Ah, that's always the way with you ladies!" cried the jocose ladies' man,—“always on the look-out for ‘interesting’ letters. Now, what do you call an ‘interesting’ letter, eh? Tell me now,” he went on, familiarly; “four sheets long, and crammed to the throat, eh? Is that your idea of an ‘interesting’ letter, Miss Stoneby? I wonder, Rosamund, are my letters ‘interesting’ enough for you?” and again he turned indolently around on the pillow.

He could not, it was true, see her face; but it was strange that he had not begun to mark when that silence fell between them, and what it meant; that he had not begun to suspect something wrong, when she was deaf and dumb to his sprightliness. If he could only have known! Only have heard a warning note! Only have dreamed that she was awakening, and that to one of her mood such an awakening was doom!

There was now no one to accuse him, none from whom to shelter him, and, alas! none to hold him in any sort of check. Daily she struggled with the light which was stealing in upon her; thrust it back, shut it out, closed her eyes, and all in vain. Could it—could it—*could* it be that others had been right after all? That those against whose injustice and narrow-mindedness she had revolted, whose littleness she had despised, and to whom she had felt herself so superior, had been nearer to the truth than herself! Nay, impossible. She would not give in to such a fancy.

Oh no; it was, she told herself, only that she was grieving to have gone against her poor dead mother's wishes, and was unable to forget that the two had bidden each other a last “good-night,” that “good-night” which had been a farewell for evermore, with mutual coldness. No word of regret had passed the daughter's lips, no syllable of affection the parent's. A stony kiss, a bald “Adieu”—and the two had parted, never more to meet.

In her agony of remorse, the one left had now none to turn to.

To her lover naturally could no hint be dropped ; and how be loyal to him, and yet seek other sympathy ?

In her first burst of indignation, Lady Caroline had used words and epithets which had burned themselves in as fire on her child's heart ; and although later, in the exuberance of spirits which had been mistaken for happiness, the generous Rosamund (with whose nature, faulty as it was, nothing mean nor petty ever had to do) had striven to obliterate the remembrance, it had, as we know, been stirred up afresh by her mother's demeanor throughout the evening. At its close she had been quite as angry with Lady Caroline as Lady Caroline had been with her, and had proudly maintained the justice of her resentment.

The next morning she had been called in to see the lifeless clay in its hushed and shrouded chamber of death,—and what wonder if, even upon that day, the first faint glimmerings of reaction had been felt toward the lover who had caused her this new and almost intolerable anguish ?

These now stole on apace.

"Would you not be glad of a cup of tea after your walk, Miss Stoneby ?" came in Major Gilbert's loud, brisk voice across the hearth—he had never attempted to modulate his accents nor compose his countenance after the first day or two—"tea can never come in too early on a raw, cold day like this ; and though it is only a little past four, what do you say, Rosamund, shall I ring, and hurry up the tea ?"

Now if there had been one thing on earth as to which Lady Caroline had been more inflexible than another, it had been having everything at King's Common done by rule. Breakfast, luncheon, dinner, and even the cosy little five-o'clock meal, had been for years served precisely the same hour, and to "hurry up" anything was not in the household code.

Against this code had the fair Rosamund many a time and oft rebelled. "Why are we so stiff and precise ? Why do we not have nice, little, merry, informal

ways like other people?" she had been wont to cry out; and during that brief heyday when all were bowing down before the gay, glad young empress, there had been actual and perceptible symptoms of giving way in this as in other respects. But then all too soon had come the admirer, the lover, the new theme for thought and matter for contest—and lesser and more trifling grievances had been overlooked, and let go.

It did seem now as if it were hardly his place, the place of one so recently admitted to the bosom of the family—and moreover admitted, as was ever present to her remembrance, by the very skin of his teeth—to overturn the old established habits of the house, which from time immemorial had been as the laws of the Medes and Persians. His hand was already on the bell: he was looking carelessly toward her, and her eye, turned at last perforce his way, was furthermore fretted by the upturned corner of the handsome hearth-rug, rolled up beneath the chair which he had dragged toward the bell. To her view the action was slovenly, disrespectful, negligent. She could not forget that this was Clementina's first visit to the house of mourning, and that none knew better than Miss Stoneby what manners had been wont to prevail in Lady Caroline's drawing-room.

"Pray don't," she exclaimed, stung to sharpness by the thought.

"Eh?" exclaimed Gilbert, dropping the bell-handle.

"I am sure Clementina is in no hurry," continued Rosamund, turning to her with gentler address, but still with the heightened color in her cheek. "It is so kind of you both to come, that we hope you will stay for a good long visit. The tea will appear at its proper time, Frederick," in a tone which Frederick had begun to hear of late.

"Oh, as you like, of course," said he pushing back the chair. "I only thought we should all be equally glad of it. And what's a cup of tea?" he went on,

with a little laugh not quite pleasant to hear. "At my father's you can ring up a cup of tea at any hour of the day or night. Tea should never be a set thing, to my mind."

"It is a set thing here," said Miss Liscard.

"So I see ; the very reason you should break down the idea. It is great nonsense."

"Being the idea, however, and having always been so—" then Rosamund recollected herself. "I do not wish to alter anything that used to be," she added, more gently. "Even the servants would think it strangely soon."

"Those servants of yours are a pampered lot," observed Gilbert, who felt that he had been snubbed almost as in the days of the *blue gown*. "It seems to me they have it all their own way in this house. I met one of the maids driving off to Longminster in the dogcart. Positively, being driven off by William in the dogcart, as cock-a-hoop as possible. I should have thought that in such a very particular household as this, such a thing would hardly—but I suppose there may be some explanation?"

If there were, it was not for him.

He received none, and might have known he should receive none.

Once before he had spied upon the household, and had told a tale which had been proved to be perfectly true, and vastly unpleasant.

Rosamund had had to own that it had been well the misdemeanor had been brought to light, but neither she nor Mrs. Ossory had thanked the person who had shown it up. The young mistress had indeed been even more annoyed than the old house-keeper, and had almost shown her lover that he would do well to keep his eyes and his ears for other uses.

Who wanted to be cognizant of every single thing, whether right or wrong, that went on in the back-yard or the garden?

Things had always got along somehow, without the need for prying and peering.

He, on his part, had expressed surprise and disapproval of the system prevailing at King's Common; and had emphatically advocated the need of a master's supervision, even to the lowest details, in the affairs of stable or kennel,—while he exclaimed "Good Lord!" a dozen times when informed that Lady Caroline had only interviewed Mrs. Ossory twice in the week, and no one else at all.

"A pretty housekeeper you'll make, you little piece of ignorance," he had cried merrily. "I know how it will be. I can hear you already ordering in legs of beef and steaks of mutton! Never mind. I can stand it. I shan't be hard upon you. And you must take lessons from my old mother, when we go there. I shall put you under her wing for a bit. She is a rare good hand, is my old ma; and would enjoy teaching you of all things. Lord! she would go clucking about like a hen with one chick; for the girls have got beyond her already, and think they know as much as she does; so she complains she has nobody to take in hand, poor old thing! It will be famous for her to have you trotting at her heels, Rosamund."

Unluckily Rosamund had not felt that it would be quite so famous, nor that the programme altogether was likely to be so felicitously carried out as planned. She had not seen herself trotting at Mrs. Gilbert's heels, nor dutifully drinking in her instructions. And what was worse, she had not liked the tone in which her lover had commented on her dead mother's habits and rules. It had not mattered that he should think herself ignorant and untrained; but he should—yes, he certainly should—have forbore to meddle with what Lady Caroline had done, or been.

It had been a different thing altogether her complaining to him—although she now devoutly wished she had *never done so*; but still, she could not help *feeling that she should not have been taken advan-*

tage of,—and that this advantage Major Gilbert had taken.

She had poured out to him, in the first warm burst of confidence, all that had been uncongenial and distasteful in her past life—even before her engagement she had allowed herself to hint at much as to which her lips should have been sealed ; and the result had been that Gilbert knew a great deal more than he need have known, and was not the man to let the knowledge lie fallow.

Neither would he now perceive that it was not his place to comment.

If he saw a neglect, or omission—and what did he not see ? he rarely came to the house without having observed something or met some one—he never dreamed of holding his tongue. It would be—“ By the way, I ran against So-and-so somewhere ”—where So-and-so had most likely no business to be ; or, “ What was Such-another-one doing somewhere else ? ” with a shrewd idea that the said Such-an-one was not about anything strictly within his own line of duty.

On these occasions Rosamund would, according to her mood, either lightly let the inquiry pass, or answer that if there were any complaint to be made, she should have it through Mrs. Ossory, or Netley, or Thunder. Only through the medium of these functionaries had rule and justice ever been administered at King’s Common, and only through them did she mean to continue to administer it.

“ As long as you are mistress here,” she had been reminded ; but she had not always smiled at the reminder and the hint conveyed.

Alas ! she had begun to be ashamed of him, and every little straw floating upon the new current of her thoughts seemed to bend in the same direction.

“ I will go and let papa know Mr. Stoneby is here ” ; and she now rose hastily, thinking as she did so, “ If papa either joins us in here or fetches Jack away, it *will* at least break up the party, and force Frederick

out of that chair." She had almost grown to hate the conjunction of Major Gilbert and her father's chair. "He always shows off at his worst in it," she now concluded.

As foreseen, Mr. Stoneby was sent for to the library, and heartily welcomed there. In truth, he had never found his host more mildly cheerful. The widower had felt that by this time he might venture to unpack the books which had arrived the night previous to Lady Caroline's demise, and upon which his yearning vision had ever since been cast. He was now having a delightful afternoon sorting and arranging, and the presence of a scholarly and congenial assistant was particularly appropriate; the rector's call could not have been better timed, and the two were immediately engrossed and disposed of for the time being.

But Rosamund did not all at once return to the drawing-room. "They can get on very well without me," she murmured half aloud, as she stole upstairs to solitude and reverie. "Oh, dear, dear! how is it that I, too, can get on so well without them—or is it him? It must be my own fault. I am so pettish, so womanish with him; no man could like it. I have lived so long in this one spot that I worry if poor Frederick does but ring a bell, or give a message unlike one that I, or any one of us, would have given. How absurd I am! Silly—ridiculous—prudish. And I who stood up for him so bravely once! And it was but the other day that Hartland praised me to Aunt Julia for being above trifling prejudices! If he could hear me now, he would change his tune. I am as bad—I am worse than them all put together! It is not Frederick who is changed—at least I do not think he is changed, although certainly he is easier and more—I don't know what; more inclined to loll about and kick out his feet, and use his—his handkerchief and his toothpick. Oh, what would mamma have thought if she had seen him bring out his toothpick! He scarcely ventured to breathe or move when she

was by, looking at him as she used to look ; but I think when away from her that he would always have been—been—I don't know what. He certainly is more free than most people in his way of speaking and bantering, and calling by name. He is wonderfully soon at home with strangers. I suppose it is his frankness. I suppose there is no harm in it. I liked it once ; surely I can not now be going to mind the very thing that pleased me so much that first afternoon we met—his singling me out, and making much of me, and saying ' Good-by ' as if we had known each other all our lives. I thought it quite delightful of him—though I do not think Mrs. Waterfield did. I know it was soon afterward that I heard her tell mamma that he was much too familiar ; and how angry I was ! Well, when we are married I must give him one or two little hints. But I wish—oh, how I wish that till then I could hold my tongue ! I know it is not for me to speak, only when he *will* say the very thing he should not—pshaw ! who cares ? I won't, whoever does. No, I won't ; so, Aunt Julia, you need not expect any relenting in that quarter, my dear auntie. She will soon like Frederick ; she likes everybody, the good soul. Hartland likes him—I *think*. All the children like him. And the very servants, though he watches and reports them, like him in their way. Oh, I am all right—I am all right," and giving herself no time for more, she went swiftly down again to the drawing-room.

And it had grown more cheerful there. The log-fire was blazing brightly, as though to defy the mists outside ; and Gilbert, who had missed her, and had thought he had vexed her, and was really in love, poor fellow, came anxiously—and not too demonstratively—forward, drew up her chair, but did not take his wonted possession of it and her—and altogether made just enough, and not too much, commotion ; so that she could not help cheering up, and the fit of the blues vanished—for that time.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAGED BIRD.

"Oh, what could it grieve for? Its feet were tied
With a silken thread of my own hands' weaving."

—KEATS.

"WHAT do you say to having the girls here?"
The suggestion was Gilbert's, and it was made after six weeks' experience of King's Common as a house of mourning.

For himself he was not dull: he had his military duties at Longminster to look after; his engagement and the family bereavement to announce; and Rosamund to make love to, and give presents to; but he fancied—perhaps justly—that she was not having quite so good a time.

The novelty of the situation had worn off, and it was no longer strange and dismal to her to behold the hatchment over the portico, and the black hangings in the family pew; it no longer seemed a liberty to touch any of what had been Lady Caroline's particular environments, to head the table at meals, and give the signal to rise after dinner. Mr. Liscard had resumed his wonted habits, and, as before, pursued his own path; while the lawyer and the steward transacted between them such business as had formerly fallen to his wife's share. Miss Penrose had recommenced lessons and rules; all—with one exception—had fallen back, more or less, into the old groove, with a diffidence of the new, natural under the circumstances,—all but Rosamund, and for her everything was changed.

She was now not only mistress of her father's

household, but prospective mistress of another, and had thus to take up two positions at once.

But although the future was surcharged with importance and variety, it seemed that, for the present, there was nothing wherewith to while away the tedious hours. As soon as all the black-edged epistles had been responded to, and the dressmakers and milliners had executed their final orders, nothing remained which could very well, according to her views, be put forward and turned into an occupation. By nature, as we know, she was neither intellectual, nor possessed with a turn for any of the fine arts; and although by no means deficient either in wit or sense, these hardly stood her in much stead at this pinch.

Society was out of the question; her old friends the Waterfields, who indeed might have been admitted to intercourse, were absent from home; Lady Julia was obliged to be careful of cold winds, and was, moreover, apt to look wistful and let fall inconvenient remarks; the Stonebys—she soon came to an end of the Stonebys,—so that, all said and done, Major Gilbert himself was the only resource of his betrothed, and it is to be feared she did not find him a sufficient one.

He was very kind; he had invariably provided something wherewith to amuse and enliven her, when he came boldly tramping in at the door, ringing no bell, but admitting himself as a man who has a right to do so. As invariably, he had brought with him a fresh color, and a fine appetite—the rewards of exercise and health. Usually he walked at this time, one of his horses being laid up; and knowing Rosamund to be also a walker, he did not like to find her sitting over the fire on a fine, breezy afternoon, in a room warmer than was wholesome, and with a book she laid aside but languidly on his entrance.

He thought she did not go out enough, did not run about enough. He remembered her as running in and out of the garden door all day long.

The weather was not tempting perhaps, but there were days when a good run and a blow in the soft south wind would have done her all the good in the world—and it transpired that on these she had not set a foot outside ! She had been afraid it was going to rain. Had he known Rosamund of old, he would have been more surprised than he was. She who had snapped her fingers at waterspouts, to be daunted by the chance of a shower !

He saw enough as it was, however, to fancy she wanted a shaking-up, and the happy idea forthwith presented itself of providing a treat for Emily and Henrietta, and at the same time giving his fair one something to do and think about.

“What do you say to having the girls here ?”

“The girls ?”

“Em and Etta. I dare say they would come. They are longing to know you. And just now, when the house is quiet, and nothing going on, you would get to know each other a long way better than at another time. What do you think ?”

“Oh, I think—yes, I think I should be very glad.” It was not exactly hearty, but it was as much so as he had expected. Rosamund had not been hearty about anything of late. “If my father has no objection,” proceeded she; “and of course they would understand that we can have no amusement for them.”

“Of course. I should say they would prefer it. They are lively girls themselves, and need no entertaining. Oh, they would be happy enough.”

“Then I will ask papa, and write at once.”

“Oh, no hurry, wait till we have had our chat”; and he drew near, affectionately, for he had just arrived.

“If I do not write now, I shall be too late for the post.”

“I forgot. That alters the case. Well, if you are as keen as all that,—” and he strove to be pleased that it was so, and easily persuaded himself that it was merely a renewal of her girlish ardor, and no

desire to escape from his embraces, which sent Rosamund so quickly out of the room. She was some time in coming back, but excused herself by producing the note already written, and inquiring, prettily, whether it were worded as he liked. Would it do?

Yes, it would do very well; ye-es—turning over the page again; very well, on the whole; it was, perhaps, just the least bit in the world formal; but after all—oh, it would do nicely, and it was very kind of her and her father, and the girls would be immensely pleased.

“How soon do you think they will come?” She was beginning to feel really a little pleased and curious herself, and was not sorry to have something—anything—to look forward to.

“What day did you ask them for? I forget. Did you name a day?”

“No. I said the first that was convenient. This is Tuesday. Perhaps about Friday?”

“I hardly think Friday,” said Gilbert, who had his own reasons for saying so. “We’ll call it Monday. I’ll just scratch a line myself,” and he sat down again at the now neglected davenport, and wrote a hasty dispatch.

Which was just like him, all at home declared. For it was to the effect that “the girls” were to be sure to come, but they were to be equally sure not to come one day sooner than that for which they could be fully and suitably equipped at all points. If they wanted frocks and hats, and fal-lals, they were to get them straightway, and he would see that the bill was paid; all he bargained for was that the young ladies, when they did appear, should do him credit. There were also several considerate suggestions, which the prompt and clear-headed brother had thought out in the interval between making the proposal and Rosamund’s return with it carried out; and finally, he promised to meet their train and go with them up to the house.

As he had foreseen and foreordained, a joyful acceptance was speedily received, and Monday was the appointed day. But unfortunately, when the Monday came, there came with it some military business which brooked of no delay, and which could only be transacted, as ill-luck would have it, during the very hour at which the sisters' train was due. He had no time to let them know; he did not know himself till after they must have started on their journey.

"Poor things! I am really sorry about it," he considered. "I know they will be in a blue funk. And it would have taken off the edge, if I could have gone up with them. But it can't be helped. I shall get over to King's Common as soon as possible; and after all, they may thank their stars they have only to encounter Rosamund—not Rosamund's mother."

"Emily, he is not here."

An anxious face looked up and down the station platform, when the long train from London pulled up that afternoon about four o'clock. "Frederick is not here," exclaimed Henrietta Gilbert, in accents almost tragic. "And he promised faithfully, and he knew how we should feel! I did think—"

"Sh," murmured Emily back. Her eye had caught sight of a tall footman lugubriously corded, and instinct told her whom it was this functionary sought. "I suppose Rosamund is outside," added she, "and has sent him in for us."

Half of the conjecture, and half only, proved correct. The footman was for them, but Miss Liscard was not outside. Miss Liscard would explain herself what had detained her. Then it became evident that the man was looking for a maid. He had taken the young ladies' bags and rugs; but it was not until Miss Gilbert herself volunteered to point out their luggage, that he desisted from further quest.

"Did he think there were more of us?" inquired Henrietta, aside.

But she was nudged to silence, and neither spoke

again until they were safe within the large, roomy omnibus which was used for station work at King's Common.

"Well, here we are at last!" cried Etta, then. "Here we are, and here we go! Really and truly we are now to make this grand visit we have talked so much about. If only Frederick had been with us now, I should feel perfectly happy. I can hardly yet believe it: I keep thinking all the while that something or other will be sure to turn up to stop us. Every morning lately I have expected a letter saying that some one else had died—"

—"Do take care."

"Oh, I shall take care, never fear. I shall be as quiet as a mouse as soon as ever we get there. Directly the smallest corner of the house comes in sight, my heart will sink down into my boots, just as it did at the station. That footman gave me a turn, and—I wonder how far we have to drive?"

"I am afraid not far."

"Why? How do you know!"

"I remember Frederick said about two miles."

"Only two miles! Oh dear, we shall take no time over two miles at this rate! I wish it had been ten."

"I am sure I don't," said Emily, who was more courageous. "I am tired with sitting still so long already; and now that there is no Lady Caroline, there is nothing really to mind."

"Oh, isn't there, though? If there *had* been a Lady Caroline, I do not believe I should ever have come."

"Perhaps we should never have been asked—except, of course, to the wedding."

"I almost wish we had not been. We could have got on famously at the wedding. We should have been driven up, for one thing, together with a lot of *others*—not all by ourselves in state, like this. The carriage would not have been sent only for us, and *that* great footman would not have discovered we

had no maid. Emily, why didn't we bring one of the housemaids?"

"We never did such a thing before," said Emily. "I never once thought of it. And I know plenty of girls don't," added she, "though I suppose some do. And after all, Etta," with a touch of sound sense, "what good would it have done, when the very first thing that would have come out among the servants would have been that she was not a real maid? We have never been fine people. Why should we begin to pretend?"

"Emily, only think what it would have been had we been going to face Lady Caroline now! As it is, this is only a girl of our own age—younger, really—and Frederick says she is most anxious to be friends, and that we must make friends of her, and draw her out. He seems to think she rather needs drawing out—what? What is it?"

"I see the lodge," said Emily, in a low, quavering voice.

"O—h!"

"Don't hold me so. It will do no good."

"Oh dear—dear—dear! Oh, how I wish it were over!"

"So do I. Never mind. It will be over in a few minutes."

They drove in through the great gates, and then on for some time, between rows of half-denuded beeches.

"I don't see the house anywhere," observed Emily at length.

"Could that have been the lodge, then?" debated her sister, for they were not accustomed to long avenues. "Oh, Em," cried she, the next minute, "do look! Look at the deer, look at that beautiful park, look at—"

"I see. Do be quiet. Don't shout like that, or the men will hear you. Frederick told us about the deer park, don't you remember? Etta, is my hair

tidy behind? Do tell me. Don't say 'yes' without looking."

"Quite," said Etta, after a hasty glance. "Am I right too? I suppose Frederick is sure to be here, at any rate. It will be such a comfort to have him. Oh, when will that house come?—and yet every moment I wish it farther off."

Emily was silent, too miserable for speech.

"If it would only come," moaned Etta, who, on the contrary, found relief in sighs. "Come, and be gone, and the whole thing over, and we comfortably in our rooms upstairs unpacking. I would give anything to have the next half-hour safely done with. What are we stopping for?"

For although there was no house, no gate, no hindrance of any sort visible, the coachman was drawing rein, and the next moment the nimble footman was on the ground, the carriage-door was being opened, and the loveliest face in the world appeared beside it.

Ere either occupant could draw a breath, the formidable meeting was over, and had been shorn of all its terrors.

"I thought I should catch you here," said Rosamund's pleasant young voice, which had such a sweet, reedy thrill about it, that even Emily and Henrietta felt the charm at once.

"I could not come down," she added, stepping inside, and taking each by the hand, "because we had an escapade in our stables, and I had to borrow my aunt's horses, and all the arrangements having to be made at the last moment, no one told me how it had been settled till too late. That is a very good train, the one you came by. It is our best train in the day. We are very much behind the rest of the world in the matter of trains, but we do boast one good one. Did you have a pleasant journey? Was it very wet?"

All the time she was thinking faster and faster. ("They are very good-looking. They are handsomely

dressed. They seem dreadfully shy. I wonder what they think of me ?")

"We shall be there directly," she ran on. "There are the stables, and the garden walk. That is the tallest poplar in the county. There are my little sisters, just let loose from lessons."

"Is my brother here ?" inquired Emily Gilbert, at last. It was the only question for which she could find voice.

"I don't know. He may be somewhere about," replied Rosamund carelessly. "If you are not tired we might take a stroll after tea. It is fine to-day, but what weeks and weeks of rain we have had !"

"Frederick told us it had been very wet," observed Henrietta, with effort number two. "This is rather a wet place, is it not ?"

Here her sister frowned. ("A wet place," muttered Emily to herself, "as if anybody liked to be supposed to live in a wet place ! Stupid thing.")

Rosamund, however, appeared readily to coincide.

"Wet is not the word," she said ; "we have been dripping for the last month. It has been unutterably, hopelessly miserable, day after day"; and in her tone there was no trace that sunshine within had banished gloom without.

"Poor thing ! how unhappy she has been !" thought the good-natured pair, and felt all at once more at home with her than they had done before ; and they dismounted at the steps, and followed Rosamund across the hall, and through the ante-room—so often trod by Frederick, and so vividly described by him—feeling much less alarmed than they had ever dared hope to be.

Still the youthful hostess had to keep the talk in her own hands. Careless and girlish, she chattered on, perceiving how ill at ease were her guests in spite of all ; and at length so obvious did it become that she was bearing all the burden, that each sister began in heart to upbraid the other. ("Etta can rattle on

against any one," reflected the aggrieved Emily there she sits now, as if butter would not melt in her mouth !")

("Emily told me I was not to speak, but to take the lead; and now, why doesn't she take the lead?" internally burned the no less outraged Henrietta.)

Each looked with undisguised eagerness for signs of the burly Frederick, their protector eree-in-ordinary—scanning every apartment for his hat, his gloves, tumbled pillows, chairs out of place, the divers signs by which his presence was known at home,—but nothing was visible.

"I suppose my brother has been detained," observed Emily anew, as though the subject was not but be one of interest.

"Possibly," said Rosamund. "Will you take your hat? And you too?" to Henrietta. "Take them down here," throwing down her own. "Do you take sugar? No? Hardly anybody takes sugar with tea now. I do. I take quantities. But I do not at any one's liking coffee without."

"I like coffee without," acknowledged Emily as if it were a crime, "and," brightening, "does Frederick."

"You never take sugar in anything then?"

"Oh yes, I do, and Frederick is as fond of things as I am; but not in coffee. You see his plate at dessert, all heaped up, and—"

"Yes, really," drawled Miss Liscard; "How brightly the sun has come out! No sugar on your brown bread and butter? Really? It is I am alone both in my sugar and my salt. I have not found much in common yet, have we?"

It certainly appeared as if they had not found anything in common. There was no response to the name, no interest in his tastes, no knowledge of his whereabouts; and whereas on every other day the pretty tea-maker appeared ready to prattle

to each allusion to her lover she was deaf. Only when this became observable, did the sisters experience any recurrence of that terrible *arrival* feeling known too well to the young and shy. They had now got over the worst. They had surmounted the station, the front door, the being ushered—as might have been—into a great unknown presence-chamber, whose depths might disclose anything—the tea, and that without any presiding elder in a big arm-chair—but what was to come next?

Ought they not now to ascend solemnly to their room and their trunks, begin to lay out dresses, hang up cloaks, find snug nooks for hats and bonnets? Ought they not, in their mother's homely phraseology, to be "shaking themselves out," and getting into their quarters generally?

But here was Rosamund putting on her hat, and talking anew about a stroll in the garden, as if they had nothing else in the world to do!

"I—I—perhaps we had better unpack first," suggested the elder Miss Gilbert, for the case, to her eyes, was desperate. "We have a good deal to take out—"

"You did not bring a maid? Oh, send the key to mine, and she will put out everything."

"Thank you very much," replied Emily doubtfully, "but I should hardly like to trouble her."

"Em always looks after us both," chimed in Etta.

"Still, perhaps—as the evening is turning out so fine," said Emily, "if—"

"The key, then, the key," cried Rosamund merrily. "Throw clothes, and trunks, and all of it to the winds. I always do. Here," holding out a beckoning hand with peremptory archness,—"*here, yield up the apple of discord, the bone of contention—the—*"

She stopped short, her hand fell, and the sparkle died out of her eyes. "I did not expect you so soon," continued the same voice, but strangely altered, to *some one behind the group.*

But in the shout of welcome from the other two, this passed. There was a simultaneous cry of "Frederick!" and with one accord both Em and Etta sprang upon him.

"Frederick! Oh!" cried Emily, with a burst of relief and joy. "Oh, Frederick!" She had no further words.

"You were not at the station, and so we thought we should find you here, and when you were not here, we wondered whatever had become of you, and if we had gone out—and we were just going out—we should have missed you again," cried her sister, letting out in one brief half-minute all the dammed-up volubility of the past hour. "When did you come? How did we not hear you? What kept you? Em said she thought—"

"Shut up, you chatterbox," said Frederick good-humoredly. "I say, Rosamund, has she been putting on the steam like this ever since she came? How are you to-day, eh?" when at last he was allowed to make his way to her. "You looked pretty bright when I came in. What was it all about, eh?"

"The key of your sister's portmanteau." There was no brightness now, however.

"And they wouldn't give it up? Wanted no one to rummage about among their goods and chattels, I suppose. Well, here you are at last, you two," holding the sisters at arm's-length and regarding them with such a look of affectionate approbation as compensated for all they had struggled through. "Three bonnie lasses; and, by Jove! I am the only man for you all! I say, Rosamund, we must get over Hartland for the girls. As he is a lord he ought to cut up into two, and let them go halves. Is he to be here to-night?"

"No."

"Humph! Well, I thought he might, that's all. *He is here often enough, I am sure. Or at least he used to be,*" continued the speaker, "he has not been

quite so much of late. I fancy he has taken to going the Stonebys' way. Oh, but we really can not allow Hartland to throw himself away upon that little goody-goody, twopenny-halfpenny Clemmy Stoneby."

Rosamund made no reply. The other two laughed, and looked for more.

"Aunt Julia is not half sharp," proceeded Gilbert, bent upon showing himself one of the family; "she is a good creature—"

"We need not discuss my aunt, if you please," said a voice that would have done credit to Lady Caroline herself: "your sisters have not yet made her acquaintance."

"They will soon, though, I hope. You will take them over to the Abbey to-morrow, I dare say? It will be a nice walk for you all, and the girls will like to see the place. They are as good as you at walking, Rosamund; they must start you again, for it strikes me you have been lazy of late. Of course there has been a reason," with a sudden turn to solemnity, "of course when there has been a death in a house—eh, what? Rosamund? Oh, she's off."

She was off. She could not endure more just then.

"Awfully sensitive, and all that, you know," nodded Gilbert, looking sagely after her. "Can't bear me even to speak of her mother; though, by George! I do my level best to speak civilly. I sail uncommonly near the wind, I can tell you. But Rosamund—well, Lady Caroline was her mother—and I suppose there's no more to be said. That sensitiveness is in the blood—and a great nuisance it is—but I ought to remember it. What do you think of her?"

On this point he could not but be satisfied; they had been greatly struck both with Rosamund's beauty and her air, and testified to the frank and pleasant welcome she had bestowed on them. To be sure, she had awed them a little, but—

"All right," said he, "I knew you would get on

with her. Only remember the sensitiveness know"; and then the three drew together for a close, delightful confabulation, in which all were of one mind, and no one had any sensitiveness to be aware of,—and it struck Em and Etta that even Fred himself breathed more freely when out of the presence of his beautiful betrothed.

CHAPTER XX.

MAJOR GILBERT'S CASE.

"She's such a miser, too, in love,
Its joys she'll neither share nor prove.
Blushing at such inglorious reign,
I sometimes strive to break my chain.

Ah, friend, 'tis but a short-lived trance,
Dispelled by one enchanting glance ;
She need but look—and I confess,
Her looks completely curse or bless."

—SMOLLETT.

"HOW ridiculous of her!" cried Henrietta, the moment the sisters were alone. "I never knew anything more ridiculous in my life. As if *we* were anybody! As if it could have mattered before *us*! She had been as pleasant as possible up to the instant Frederick appeared; and then, Emily, then did you notice what a change there was?"

"No one could have helped noticing," said Emily, "and I must say I had thought Rosamund would have been above such affectation; but as Frederick did not seem to mind, it is not for us to pick holes."

"We don't pick the holes; we only see them when they are there. To begin to play off her airs directly a man was by! And it was not as if she could have supposed he would admire them, for at one time he was almost huffy himself."

"You mean about Lord Hartland?"

"Why she quite snapped at him."

"Oh, not 'snapped,'" said Emily, with a swift perception that it would be out of keeping for an earl's daughter to "snap"; "but Rosamund certainly did

not like it. I wonder why, for Frederick said nothing she could have minded."

"She thinks this fine cousin of hers too good for us."

"Perhaps," Emily nodded thoughtfully. "Frederick said they made a great deal of him, as the head of the family."

"But we must see him and speak to him some time," quoth Etta, recovering. "He will not keep away from the house because we are here. And I do think that if Rosamund is going to be ashamed of us—"

—"Hush! Nonsense! How you do run on! Who said Rosamund was going to be ashamed of us? Just because she colored a little when Frederick jested about Lord Hartland cutting up into two—"

—"But why should he not? Why should Frederick not? Why—"

—"Why—why—why," cried her sister impatiently. "If you are going to say 'why' to everything you meet with here, it is a pity you came. How am I to tell the 'why' of things any more than yourself? Here we are, and we must make the best of it—"

"Make the best of it! And I thought we were going to be so happy and comfortable, once we were safely in our own room, unpacking all our nice new things, and talking over everything!" cried poor Etta, almost in tears. "I declare I don't feel happy a bit. I wish I was at home again. I wish we had never come."

"Rubbish! Don't be silly," exhorted Emily, with a suspicious little choke in her own voice. "I suspect we are both a couple of simpletons. We feel rather out of it somehow in this great, big place, where everything is so stately and solemn, and so unlike our own ways at home; besides, Frederick's not meeting us at the station gave us the shivers, and we got upset; and so, because he and Rosamund did not fall into each other's arms—"

—"That was it, I dare say," assented Etta, somewhat comforted. "And I am tired too, Em; aren't

you? And my head aches with that hot hat; and then, though I drank the tea, I could not eat one atom of my bread and butter, and I have such a sinking inside me now. Yet it isn't hunger. I don't believe I shall be able to touch a morsel of dinner, unless—unless Rosamund is different."

"She did give one cross look, I own. But you know, Etta, every one says we are a good-natured family, and we don't understand cross looks. Oh, we may be quite sure, certain, positive, it is all right between them. Of course it is, or would he have looked so content and well satisfied? There, now; that settles the question. Now, Etta, roll up those empty papers and put them back into the basket, to be ready for the return journey, and we will begin to dress in earnest."

Dressing in earnest meant dressing speedily and satisfactorily. Accustomed to waiting on themselves, the sisters had refused all proffers of aid, and now arranged their own hair, selected their own ornaments, and fastened each other's frocks—and insensibly their spirits revived beneath the process.

It was a lovely autumnal evening, mild as summer, though the season was mid-November, and the balmy air came through their open windows long after darkness had settled down over the land, and had rendered candles imperative within; while the peaceful stillness of the hour was broken only by the tinkling of the sheep-bell, or the faint rumble of a solitary cart in the distance. To ears accustomed to the ceaseless hum of a suburban neighborhood, whose nearest approach to silence was the cessation of near and dominant sounds, the absolute hush which at nightfall pervaded the precincts of the old country mansion, surrounded by its own woods and glades, and with a thinly peopled, far-stretching rural district beyond, was a new experience. The youthful strangers had never before imagined anything of the kind, *and in the present bewildered state of their thoughts*

and feelings the repose of nature had a so tranquilizing influence.

"We must go downstairs, I suppose," at last, with a sigh. "I wish we could t quietly here a little longer; but I suppose not be polite. I suppose it would hardly had anybody to tell us these things,—but not, it is best to be on the safe side."

"And I think I am quite ready for again," responded her sister cheerfully brightened up; and I want to see all th seen, and find out all that is going on, at our next meeting with Rosamund."

It was got over sooner than she thou unexpectedly as the first had been. They a light figure on the staircase, and it app while they were in all the glory of blue sashes, embroidered slippers, brooches, b lockets, Rosamund was still in her plain dress, and was only now beginning to p rough outer jacket, while her hat swung c All betokened haste and lateness. She ha in the dusk, she explained hurriedly; had e than she knew; was flying to dress now; be a minute; and would they go downst drawing-room, where there was sure to be probably her next sisters, Catherine and had been promoted to appearing there, be so delighted?—and the end of the se dropped from the banisters of the upper la

"There, she is all right again," murmu much relieved. "I told you we were mal tains out of molehills. How pretty she dare say," still lower,—"I dare say, Et Frederick—" and a pinch of the arm suppli

"O-h!" Down went Etta's mouth, at her eyebrows: enlightenment could go Sly Rosamund! Lucky Frederick! 7 what they were about after all, and—

The next sight was Frederick himself, luxuriously stretched beside the drawing-room fire, in full evening dress, conning the paper with the air of a man who has had leisure for every portion of it, advertisements included, and who now laid it aside with the greatest alacrity.

"It's you, is it? That's right. I thought it could hardly be Rosamund; she's not of the punctual sort. Well, now, let me look at you. Ay, you'll do very well. I should say you are all right. Up to the mark. They dress a lot in these houses, or else perhaps"—with a shade of doubt—"perhaps you might seem a little overdone for just now. Rosamund, you see, can't put on anything but black, and I don't think she has a single black ornament."

"But she expects us to dress," said Etta. "She spoke of 'dressing for dinner' as if it were the usual thing."

"Of course. So it is. She dresses every evening of her life. All I mean is, that I wish you could have seen her in full fig for a ball, or as she looked that first day I dined here—the day we were engaged. By Jove! But she has never looked like it since, poor girl."

"She looked lovely just now," cried Etta enthusiastically. "We met her on the stairs, and she looked so fresh and bright—"

"Ay, that's what she does, when she is at her best. But she needs the open air to set up her color. She was not in good face to-day; she had not been out enough."

"She has just come in now."

"Just come in!—come in now? My goodness! do you mean that she has been out till now? I thought she had been with you," cried he, in surprise and vexation. "I thought you had all been together unpacking. Has she never been near you?"

"Indeed, yes. She came to us directly we went upstairs—after we left you, when her maid called us,

you remember," eagerly replied Emily. "She could not have been kinder; only we wanted no help, and I think she saw that—that Etta and I would rather be alone. You know, Frederick, we are not used to visiting, especially at these great houses, and Rosamund seemed to understand exactly, and we thought it so kind of her to leave us a little to ourselves."

"That was it, was it?" said he, mollified. "Oh, it is all right, if that was the way. Oh, I knew Rosamund would be kind, and all that; but I want her to be friendly and chummy with you—what girls are with each other. She has often told me she never could be really thick with those prigs of Waterfields; and she don't take to Clementine Stoneby, the only other girl at hand, and so I thought she would be sure to hit it off with you two. I have no doubt she will, by-and-by."

"Oh, yes," said Henrietta cheerfully. "It doesn't take long to know us; and Em and I want to be friends above everything."

"Have you seen any of the young ones, yet?"

"No. Rosamund thought some of them would be here."

"They were, but they made off. There was something or other on hand. They have not been with Rosamund either, then?"

They had not, for they came in at the moment, satisfactorily accounting for their departure, and eager to make acquaintance with the new-comers. Neither of the two possessed the beauty or grace of their elder sister, and whether it were due to this cause or not, it is certain that the Miss Gilberts at once felt more at home with them,—the redness and sharpness of Catherine's arms, and the sadly vulgar cold in the head under which poor little Dolly was laboring, reducing them, it seemed, to any level.

Moreover, the plain black frocks had been made at home, and made to allow for growth; they neither fitted, nor had been made to fit; they were long and

loose, and hideously unbecoming. At an age when every art is required to soften irregularities and shade defects, the straight, business-like, uncompromising breadths seemed as though they had sworn to conceal nothing and lend themselves to no illusions, and the effect on Emily and Henrietta was, as we have said, immediate and exhilarating.

They could at once proceed to interrogate names and ages after the approved fashion, and in less than five minutes Dolly was trying on Etta's bracelets, and Catherine was waving Emily's fan, as if they had been acquainted all their lives.

Gilbert looked on approvingly. He was really fond of girls and boys, and had already, by timing well his applications, obtained for these two in particular divers indulgences, which, to tell the truth, he desired almost as much for his own sake as theirs. To him they owed their freedom of this present hour; from him came boxes of chocolate creams and other sweet things; through him and his engagement was opened up the brilliant prospect which formed the subject of their daily talks and nightly dreams. It followed that he was a favorite, and that his sisters would have been well received on that ground alone; but directly it became apparent that the grown-up misses, in their finery and trinkets, were ready to be friends with them, and did not condescend, nor—horror of horrors!—treat them as *little girls*, Catherine and Dolly were soon at home, and all the party were chattering gayly and loudly together when a quiet step was heard within the doorway, and Mr. Liscard, rather astonished by the unusual hilarity, appeared on the scene.

"My sisters, sir," said Gilbert, with something of a flourish. "This is Miss Gilbert; and this is Henrietta. You would never know which was the eldest if I did not tell you," he added parenthetically.

"That means that papa will have to take the eldest in to dinner," exclaimed Dolly, for the general benefit.

"Then I must dine too to take in the second," cried Catherine, seizing on the idea. "Do, Frederick, say that I must. Ask Rosamund when she comes in, won't you? Somebody must take you in," she added to the appreciative Etta; "and here am I, if Rosamund will only let me."

"Ask your papa," suggested Gilbert, who had found the wisdom of so doing in his own case.

"Papa, may I? Oh, papa, do say yes. May I go and tell them to lay a place for me? Say yes, papa. *Please*, papa, be quick before Rosamund comes in. Is it 'Yes'? I know it is 'Yes,'" and the usually placid and demure Catherine almost shook the coat-sleeve she held in her urgency.

Everybody laughed.

"You will have to give in, sir," said Major Gilbert merrily; "you can not possibly resist such an attack."

"Eh, what? But—but—" hesitated the poor widower, who well knew he was being imposed upon, and in what light a demand so audacious would have been looked upon in past days—"stop a minute. Wait till your sister comes down. Here she comes."

"Then all hope is over," muttered Catherine, letting the sleeve go. "I know she won't. Cross thing. She never lets us have any fun. She is worse even than—than it used to be," evading a more direct reference. "If I had only got papa to say 'Yes,' and had told Badeley—" But here she stopped in amazement.

Major Gilbert had himself put forth her petition, and—wonder of wonders!—Rosamund was actually consenting to it. Yes; consenting readily—somewhat hurriedly—quite graciously—and with no reservations.

She could hardly believe her ears.

Even Gilbert was surprised, since the young lady had not been exactly inclined to be acquiescent and compliant of late, but rather the contrary—disposed to dispute a position merely because it had been taken

up, and argue against an opinion for no other apparent reason than that it had been put forward.

He had good-temperedly borne with and humored her, as he would a fractious child, telling himself that she was not well and not herself ; but, like Catherine, he had certainly rather anticipated a brief refusal now than otherwise, and had thought it would be a good thing to have the matter settled before her appearance.

To his mind Catherine, since she was disposed to be chatty and genial, would be a distinct acquisition to the small and possibly somewhat silent party. Mr. Liscard hardly ever talked, his sisters would relapse afresh under the new ordeal of the stately repast, and Rosamund—it might chance that Rosamund was in one of her moods.

He was now agreeably surprised by her easy assent, and furthermore, to find no one called over the coals—as Catherine had more than once been of late—for presuming and encroaching. He looked at his betrothed with gratitude and admiration. He thought she looked as she did upon that memorable evening. As on it, she was now but carelessly arrayed, and there had been no time to rearrange the loose tresses of her hair. Moreover, she had forgotten both a buckle and a ribbon ; but in the haste and incompleteness he thought he read an effort made for his sake—and that was enough.

The changing color and dropping eyelids were more to him than any dazzling display of charms ; and the apologetic "I am so sorry—I am afraid I have kept you waiting—I see I am late," was all that was needed to draw him to her side.

"In the best of time," he said heartily. "One minute only after the dinner has been announced. That is quite as near as any one can expect, isn't it?" and he pressed the hand on his arm kindly.

"Is it? I—I am very glad."

"You were late coming in. I think, from what my

sisters tell me, that you deserve a medal for accomplishing such a transformation in so short a time. You certainly must be the quickest dresser in the world. I dare say it comes from being alone. Two, when they get together, talk."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"You had a run before dinner?"

"Yes. I had asked your sisters to go round the gardens with me," continued Rosamund, "but they seemed to prefer being taken to their room, being just off a long journey—"

—"Ay, they are no great travelers, and had had an early start. Besides, coming here is an event with them. So you had to go alone? You did not think of me?" as he led her to her seat.

"You? No. I—I thought you had had a long walk already."

"You might have given me the refusal."

But it was said without ill-will, and was so obviously meant to be taken in good part that she went so far as to make no answer at all.

They seated themselves at table, and grace was said.

For Em and Etta there was certainly now their first taste of the sweets of grandeur. To begin with, all preliminary terrors—even to the first shake of their host's hand, and to the doubt as to which he would offer his arm to, and the wonder what should be done if he offered it to the wrong one—had now been happily disposed of. Then the tempting dinner-table, sweet with flowers, and shining with glass and silver, had been reduced to a square to suit the smallness of the party, and the party itself was disposed to be cheerful. So that, though the room in which they sat was large and lofty, and the meal was a composed, noiseless, and stately affair, so far as eating and serving was concerned, it was by no means either what it would have been beneath the iron sway of the dead Lady Caroline, nor yet what Rosamund might have made it, had she been so minded.

There was no oppression in the air. There was even a general consciousness that conversation, or rather prattle which could hardly be dignified by the name, was being anxiously encouraged and timorously cultivated.

Then Major Gilbert talked and jested freely, having soon begun to do so under such conditions. He could almost have fancied the earliest days of his courtship back again, in meeting Rosamund's supporting applause, and the challenge that her dark eyes flashed around.

When he drew her on to unite with him in recounting victories they had won, and fights they had fought together on the archery or tennis lawn, she was ready to attest and smile almost as she once had been. When he went still further, hinting broadly at what the future might have in store, the flush on her brow told of no cold rebuke nor indifference, but rather of a vivid and strong emotion; and the silence which followed seemed but its natural sequence.

He was more than satisfied—he was absolutely radiant.

"Come, Em, bless my soul! you don't say you don't like apple-fritters?" cried he, as she let the appetizing dish pass. "Why, there's nothing in the world beats apple-fritters when they're good, and they are always good in this house," helping himself plentifully. "These are simply first-rate," after the first mouthful. "Your own apples, of course, Rosamund? You have had a rare crop of apples this year."

His next sally was confidential.

"I say, Etta," to the sister next him, "look at Em now. By Jove! she knew what she was about. She waited for the pancakes, the greedy monkey. I thought one ought never to have pancakes except on Shrove Tuesday. I thought it went against people's consciences, Rosamund."

"I don't know about consciences," said Rosamund;

"but certainly neither of these are correct company dishes. Your sisters must excuse our very old-fashioned cook."

"Faith, I will, if they don't," said Gilbert, laughing. "Long may old-fashioned dishes abound for me! I hope you will remember the sentiment, Rosamund. There's no resisting 'em. But I say, how's this? You take nothing. Now I think of it, I don't believe you have eaten a single thing all through the dinner! You have said 'No' to everything. How is it? 'Not hungry?' Oh, but that will never do. You must have a glass of wine, anyway," and he seized the decanter from the man who was pouring out some for himself.

She took it to please him.

Had he offered her a cup of poison at the moment, I almost think she would have taken it all the same.

"Are you cold?" said he suddenly. It seemed to him that she shivered as she put the wine-glass to her lips, and he laid his hand on hers. "Why, it is burning hot!" he cried. She started as if she had been pricked with a dagger's point. She stared at him as if she wondered what he meant when he spoke.

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CHAPTER XXI.

TEMPEST.

"What shall I do? Resentment, indignation,
Love, pity, fear, and memory, how I've wronged him;
Distract my quiet with the very thought on't,
And tear my heart to pieces in my bosom."

—OTWAY.

NO, she was not going to break with him.
She had only had the idea presented to her.

An hour before, she had met Hartland in the garden, and he had come upon her in an unguarded moment; some scene, some recollection, had been present immediately before, and fancying herself unseen and unheard, she had been giving vent in irrepressible sobs, and sighs, and broken articulations, to the tempest of her heart.

She knew now that she did not love the man to whom her troth was plighted—that she never had, never could have loved him; and forthwith it seemed to her that every living creature, free from such a chain as bound herself, was to be envied.

Her own hands had, as it were, locked the chain, and locked it must remain; but oh! would to God she had never known Frederick Gilbert!

All her youth, all the brightness and sweetness of the life on which she might now have entered as a free, glad, heedless creature, seemed at once to rise and mock her folly, who had erewhile held it cheap.

Her old home, that she had once panted to be quit of, how dear, how delightful might it now have become! Her father? He would have promoted everything, tolerated everything, given her free scope in everything. Aunt Julia would have been the head

and front of every sort of happy misrule. The children should have had a bright childhood. The boys should have brought home their school friends; the neighbors would have gathered round; summer festivals, autumn shooting-parties, and winter revelries in accord with the merry Yule-tide season—all would have been within reach, and there would have been now no one to run counter to, and extort a grudging consent from (alas! it was Rosamund's own mother of whom the girl thought, although the version was an involuntary one)—and on all of this fair prospect she had now to turn her back, and receive, as solitary compensation, Frederick Gilbert, whom every day she loved less, and matrimony, which every day she dreaded more.

It had never been these, it had been the gratification of self-will, and the thirst of her soul after emancipation and freedom, which had been the bait.

That very morning—the morning of the sisters' arrival,—something—some trifle—had vexed her spirit afresh. She had meant to conceal the annoyance, but had been betrayed by her lover's sudden appearance into revealing more than she had been herself aware of, as we know. She had but been pettish, she thought, and Frederick never seemed to mind such pettishness. It was not worth thinking about on his account, but—but—and she had rushed out into the balmy dusk afterward, like a wild thing escaped from its snare, there to wring her hands and sob unseen.

Inadvertently Hartland had caught her thus. He did not waste time in preliminaries.

"You may as well tell the truth, Rosamund," he said; "nothing but the truth will save you and him now."

"The truth?" She struggled to rein in the rushing breath and quivering lip, and, with head averted, made a desperate feint even yet to hold her own. "The truth! What truth."

"It is only doing Gilbert injustice," proceeded her

cousin, unheeding the question. "He has acted in a plain, straightforward manner toward you, and you—I am afraid you are deceiving him."

"Hartland!"

"And yourself too."

"Hartland!"

"I have no motive for saying so, you know; and, of course, if your mother had been alive, I should never have interfered; but the fact is, it seems there is no one else to speak. No one else seems to see."

"And you—you—?"

"Oh, I see plainly enough. You took this good fellow in an obstinate fit, and now you have got him, you don't care to keep him. You think he is not worth the trouble. Well, I'll be plain, and I'll say I think he is being confoundedly badly used. What's more, Rosamund, if it were not for his own sake, I should say you were bound to stick to him. You would have no right to throw him over. But for his—" he paused.

"You think he is too good for me?"

"He is too good for you to play fast and loose with."

"Hartland, how dare you?" A sudden flash.

"Oh, I dare because there is no one else," said he indifferently. "Your father will not—"

"Certainly he will not. My father never spoke to me in my life as you have done."

"Just so. Neither would your aunt."

"No indeed."

"Nor any one else—now?"

"No."

"Somebody must," said Lord Hartland doggedly.

"For his sake, I suppose?"

"For his sake, yes. I am, of course, sorry also for you, but—"

"It is natural to put him first."

"Because he has done no wrong," maintained Hartland, looking her steadily in the face.

She was silenced. A full minute passed, and neith-

er would nor could be the first to break it. At length, as often happens in such cases, both burst forth at once.

"The fact is, Rosamund—"

"I must say, Hartland—"

"Well?" said he, yielding precedence.

"You—you might have spoken sooner."

"Oh." This was hardly what he had expected, and it must be owned he was somewhat taken aback by it. "Well, I suppose I might," he said slowly, at last.

"You have been on the watch, you have played the spy," continued his cousin, excitedly clasping her hands, and drawing quick, short breaths as she spoke. "How, then, how has it happened that while you have been so clear-sighted and penetrating, you have not said a word, nor—nor—"

"I have *not* played the spy, Rosamund, or I might have done so. I only saw, when the light was forced upon me; I only knew, when ignorance became impossible."

"You mean by—by—"

"Your face, your voice, your manner, your everything. You are a changed creature. You are ungracious, sullen, bitter—you who used to be—"

"Never mind what I used to be."

"When he is by, I could almost call you shrewish."

"It is a pity he does not find me so."

"At other times you are sunk in melancholy, or—
or else—"

"Or else?—what else?"

"As I found you just now," said he, in rather a low voice.

There was another pause.

"And all the rest," said Rosamund presently. "How is it that you alone have perceived what all beside have been blind to? You have been so clever—where have their wits been?"

"You may well ask that. I ask it of myself continually."

"You mean that I have done nothing to—to keep up appearances?"

"Not much, certainly."

"It is false," cried Rosamund passionately. "I have tried and tried, no one knows how much,"—she bit her lip, and wrenched her hands apart, furious with herself for an admission so inadvertent. "You have no right to force this out of me; your cruel accusations oblige me to—to—"

"You have told me nothing I did not know before," said he quietly.

"You think Major Gilbert is not satisfied?"

"Of that you must be a better judge than I."

"You think he is being duped?"

"Ask that of yourself. There again you should know best."

"And this is the friend of the injured man, who now interposes on his behalf," exclaimed Rosamund, with renewed fire; "this is the benevolent bystander, who can not stand by and see 'a good fellow' played 'fast and loose' with! How brave of you, my cousin! How noble! It is a pity, however, the effect is somewhat marred by over-caution. He marches boldly enough to the attack, but directly it comes to close quarters he knows nothing, and can give an opinion on nothing. Oh, the diffidence, the modesty of some people! Pray, Lord Hartland, accept my humble commendations. I can not sufficiently applaud the course you have chosen to adopt."

If she had hoped to taunt him into recrimination, the effort failed.

"Applaud or not, as you please," said Hartland bluntly. "I expected you'd be angry, and I suppose I ought to say you have a right to be. All the same, do, for heaven's sake, Rosamund, take my words to heart, and put an end to this—this mistake, as soon as you can."

"How dare you speak so? How dare you call it 'a mistake'?"

"I could easily call it by a worse name. But," and his tone softened, "I will only say 'mistake,' and a very unfortunate one. This engagement should never have taken place; the only remedy is to break it off as speedily as possible."

"I will never break it off."

He stopped short, surprised at last. He now knew that he had meant her to snatch at the suggestion.

"You will not?" he said.

"Not while I live."

"You prefer a lifelong misery to a passing humiliation?"

"I prefer keeping my word to breaking it."

"You are not keeping it; you are only keeping the shell of it. You are keeping it in the letter only—the spirit is already broken."

"He does not know this. He never shall know it."

"How are you to keep it from him? And even if you do keep it, are you to go on befooling him through all life—"

—"Befooling him! Hartland—Hartland." She was choking with passion. "How cruel, how wicked you are! How—how can you—how dare you speak to me like that? And you,—you know all—you know how hard I had to fight for him, and how I had to stand up for him before everybody; and how I—I—oh, you must remember that dreadful scene?—and there were many, many more that you know nothing of, besides that one! Mamma was so determined against him. Aunt Julia was against him too; and my friends, I think that every one of them was the same. Only I—and—and you, were for him."

"Nay, Rosamund, I never—"

—"You never what? Do you mean now to say that you never encouraged me, never told me I was right, and—"

—"Only when I thought your heart was engaged. Had I known more—"

—"What more could you have known? You knew

as much as any one ; quite, quite as much as I did myself. No one really knew—”

—“ Take care,” said Hartland softly touching her arm ; “ do not let us be overheard,” pointing to some gardeners at work near. “ Come back this way,” and he led her again into the narrow hedged-in path from which unconsciously they had been about to emerge. “ Do not suppose that I underrate all the difficulties that have beset you, Rosamund,” he proceeded after a few minutes’ pause. “ From the first you have had a thorny path to tread, and you have had to tread it alone and unaided. But you seemed so strong and resolute, and so entirely able to cope with the task you had set yourself—”

—“ The task ? I don’t understand. What task ? ”

“ It must always be a task to run counter to one’s family. Forgive me for speaking in plain words, but—”

—“ Oh, the plainer the better.”

“ We are getting no nearer the point,” said Hartland suddenly, “ and time is passing—we must not waste it in idle retrospect: it is no use looking back—all that can now be done—”

“ Nothing can now be done—nothing, nothing. Oh, why did you come here to try me, to tempt me ? ” cried Rosamund bitterly. “ I never asked your help, I never went to you with my story,—I could bear it myself, if I were only let alone. The others are far kinder than you. They say nothing, and see nothing. And after all,” defiantly,—“ after all, what is there to see ? I am not, perhaps, recklessly and wildly in love, as the saying is,” with a laugh of scorn. “ I have found out that—that Major Gilbert is but a man, and not a hero. He does very well. He is very kind. He is quite good enough for me. What is all this stir about, then, I should like to know ? And who are you, that you should interfere, and presume to—” and again rising resentment choked her utterance.

“ *If we go on like this we shall never come to an*

end," exclaimed Hartland, with what seemed but the natural impatience of a man under feminine circumlocution, though a close observer might have dimly suspected another emotion struggling beneath. "Rosamund, look how the darkness is creeping on. I can not wait—nor can you. We must not be longer here together, and this may be my last, my very last chance of seeing you alone. Do hear me, do not be angry with me. You say you mean to marry Major Gilbert, although you own—yes, you do, you *have* owned that you no longer love him. You may do this thing, Rosamund—I suppose there is no one to prevent your doing it; but remember that when you have fulfilled your promise as it now stands, you have only begun the horrible farce—"

—"Why need it be a farce?" But in spite of herself, she was awed by his vehemence.

"It would be a farce you would have to keep up year after year—"

—"It need never be one at all. I could learn to feel differently. Others do. I have often heard it said that affection comes after marriage—"

"Not to women like you, Rosamund. With you, to love would be to love, and to hate to hate," proceeded the speaker, in a slow, unimpassioned tone, which seemed to be but the outcome of his own thoughts, addressed to the silent dusk and no human ear. "With you the dawn of disenchantment would close at night in thunders of despair. You would grow desperate—perhaps worse. You would make all around you miserable, and your own heart would bleed to death. I know you well. I should be afraid for you—afraid for you." He turned away his head.

Another silence, another long interval, wherein the two dimly outlined figures paced on side by side, each occupied with an internal struggle.

"You are so young," said Lord Hartland at length, "you did not know what you were about. The world will blame you if you now faithfully confess as much,

but those who know you best will understand and forgive. After all, however, it is not for yourself that I plead—it is for him. He may be, he must be wounded in his tenderest point, if you confess to him the truth—as you know the truth in your own heart to be; but think, Rosamund, only think what that wound would be were it to take place when there was no remedy! His whole life would be ruined by his having been the victim of your caprice. For God's sake, Rosamund—dear Rosamund—do not so barbarously use a heart whose only fault is loving you."

Before she could find voice for a reply he was gone.

"Rosamund, dear Rosamund!" The words rang in her ears, and throbbed through all her pulses. He had never at any time so addressed her hitherto; she had never had an affectionate word from him that she could remember.

And now, of all times, to call her "dear"! Now, at the close of such a conversation upon such a subject. Now, when the hardest things had been said, and the coldest tones used, and no veil, not the thinnest, of charity had been thrown over the ugly, naked truth.

No shade of consideration had been shown. Scarce an excuse had been offered.

He had divined her misery, and those haunting suspicions which ceaselessly hung overhead where'er she moved or turned: and he had ruthlessly dragged the dark shadow from the background, and told her what it was, and how it should be dealt with. He had expressed no pity, no regret for her. A mere perfunctory "I am sorry for you" could not take rank as any real compassion; and it had been almost more than either her temper or her pride could bear, to be exhorted to courage and openness, as though she were some cowardly child shrinking from a well-merited punishment.

* With difficulty she had held back the flood-gates of her wrath; and then, that one little word, that one

soft tone, had altered all. Her swelling heart hung upon the remembrance. Every former feeling vanished.

It grew late, yet she could not go in to face her lover, her guests, light, noise, and merriment.

Out in this kindly spot she must have another, and yet another brief moment, for thoughts unutterable and pangs unintelligible.

How had this strange interview come about? How had it begun?

She strove to call to mind his opening sentence, and the shock it had given her.

She had, she knew, experienced a momentary convulsion, a sudden upheaval of emotions, in which amazement, shame, and anger had struggled for the mastery.

Then had followed a woman's swift instinct for concealment. She would allow nothing, acknowledge nothing, if possible betray nothing; and in her poor, weak, childish way she had, as we have seen, again and again endeavored to divert the charge, turn it aside, and carry the war into the enemy's country.

She had summoned every power she possessed to her aid, and had been undeniable in her spirit, and prompt in maintaining her independence.

For all his seeming insensibility, he could not but have winced now and again.

She had meant him to wince; would fain have hurt, tortured him—done anything to revenge the agony he was inflicting on her. For her he had not had one kind thought. Therein lay—although Rosamund little knew it—the sting of the whole.

The hot tears streamed unchecked over her cheeks now. Not one kind thought!

And she had been so used to his approval, to his partisanship,—she had so counted on having him always on her side in battles past! He had been her shield, her stay, her stronghold in Lady Caroline's

time,—his word on her behalf had been worth its weight in gold, his support invincible.

She had allowed to herself that the consciousness of his applause had been one of the sweetest ingredients in her cup of triumph.

All was now withdrawn. In his eyes she had forfeited every claim to approbation. The nobility of mind wherewith he had credited her, what did he think of it now ?

As plainly as though he had put it into words, it had been shown that he despised her in the sharpness of disappointment, and looked with scorn upon the childish whim which he had mistaken for something finer.

She snatched a blossom from her path, and tore the petals out.

Resentment, mortification, and a fierce desire yet to acquit herself of the hateful charge, raged in her burning bosom. It was no longer Gilbert of whom she thought ; he was nothing—less than nothing—to her at the moment. She had no quarrel with him, had received no injury from him.

Had he then and there confronted her, she would have received him—as she did afterward receive him—with gentleness and shamefacedness.

Had he at once demanded and urged the fulfillment of her troth-pledge, the request would almost certainly have been granted.

Anything to put Hartland in the wrong ; chafe and thwart Hartland ; flaunt her resolution before Hartland's eyes. Who was he that he should stand forward and constitute himself the champion of the absent ?

Had she not chosen Frederick Gilbert of herself, and by herself ; held to him in the teeth of difficulty, resistance, and oppression ; faced Lady Caroline at her worst, and won the game against all odds ?

And yet now, forsooth, for the man's own sake, because Gilbert was her poor defenseless victim, be-

cause his life would be ruined by her constancy, must this meddler step in between, and with a high hand command her to let her lover go !

Opposition, indeed, passive as well as active, she had hitherto experienced. Lady Julia had been tearful, other relations dubious, the neighborhood generally unsympathetic. But the feeling had so obviously emanated from a sense of *her* having found no fitting mate, of *her* superiority to the match, that she had been able haughtily to ignore it.

Now the tables were turned. She was informed that it was she who was not good enough for Gilbert.

He was true—she was a deceiver. He was honest—she was playing a part.

The insult was too much.

And then, just as this point had been reached, would come to pass a strange, inexplicable transformation of the whole. A word, two words—two little words, and a falling tone, and a troubled eye, would come between all else and memory ; and the rankling thorn, and the cruel rebuke, and the still more cruel indifference, would all vanish, be lost, swallowed up in—in what ? "*Dear Rosamund.*"

CHAPTER XXII.

"IT MAKES ME MAD WITH ROSAMUND."

"Artful concealment ill becomes the brave."

—*Odyssey*.

LET not my readers be misled by the interview recorded in the last chapter.

It had been, we may as well say at once, full as natural and spontaneous as had appeared. Nothing had been further from Rosamund's thoughts than that she should thus be taxed for doing her lover injustice,—nothing more foreign to Hartland's nature than thus to tax her.

But, as he had shown, there was no one else to bell the cat.

He had sounded his aunt, and to his astonishment even that peaceable, rotund little spinster had bristled all over at the very idea of Major Gilbert's not having every reason to be proud, and thankful, and content. The young man, Lady Julia had averred, had got what he wanted—a footing in their family. Furthermore, he had selected and obtained the flower of the flock, the pick of the bunch. Pray, what more could he desire? What was there left to desire? For her part at least, she could see nothing. Her poor, dear sister no longer there to oppose nor obstruct his wishes in any way, he had made good his position as prospective son-in-law and brother-in-law, in a way that she must own fairly took away her breath. He had carried all before him in the hitherto impregnable fortress of King's Common; Rosamund was one with him, Mr. Liscard deferred to him, the children abetted him, the *servants obeyed him*. He seemed to pervade all, and

govern all. He was ill to please indeed, if he were not satisfied. For herself, she wished to hear no more of the subject. Major Gilbert's very name was distasteful to her; the whole affair was distasteful to her; and though she was obliged to be outwardly polite, and restrain herself before her niece, Hartland, who knew how unhappy and disappointed she had been made by it all, might spare her the discussion of so odious a topic.

Subsequently she had chid herself for being peevish and out of humor,—but still he had seen that no good could come of pressing her further.

Could he indeed have said—"Save Rosamund; speak to Rosamund for her own sake," he would have obtained an immediate hearing. But this was just what he could not do. Truth was a native inhabitant of his bosom, and truth at this juncture forbade diplomacy. Honestly he thought his cousin ought to suffer whatever evil consequences should be the result of her own rash act,—as honestly he felt that Gilbert was an innocent man wronged.

To have gone then either to herself, or to Lady Julia, saying other than he had said, was impossible.

Failing the relation most natural and best beloved, he had, before appealing to Rosamund, made one other effort—he had spoken to Mr. Liscard. But he had been obliged to be so vague, he had seen such staring, hopeless incredulity on the other side of enlightenment, and there had been such an obvious internal "Good heavens!—what *can* the fellow mean?" that he had hastily given up the attempt, and had never tried a second.

This had happened only a few hours before he had met his cousin in the twilight, and his mind running on her affairs, he had been lost in meditation, and had only just arrived at the conclusion that whosoever business it was to interfere, it was certainly not his, *when* he found himself launched headlong into the

very thick of a hand-to-hand combat with Rosamund herself.

The fight once begun, Hartland had, as we know, struck out boldly, neither mincing his meaning nor smoothing down his implications.

She had been no less ready with retort and defiance, and, as he had anticipated, had roundly asserted her ability to manage her own affairs.

Then he had called her "dear Rosamund," and her parted lips had forgotten to speak, and her eyes had met his for one long, burning moment.

He had gone with that word and look ; but he had not himself been fully aware that he had done so, because he durst not trust himself to speak another, nor to meet that gaze again.

Oh, why, why, why had he never so felt, so shuddered and glowed before ?

He had had his chance, the fairest chance man ever had,—and he had beheld it come and go with an indifference which seemed now incredible. He had not even been awakened to a sense of danger by pangs of incipient jealousy when Gilbert's star had first appeared on the horizon. On the contrary, he had been interested, aroused, nay, after a fashion amused by the affair in its earliest stages ; while afterward Lady Caroline's foolish and arbitrary attempts to stamp it out had excited in his heart a degree of opposition, which had sharpened into fervor after the rescue in the mill-dam.

By that time, it is true, a new admiration and sympathy had begun to stir his spirit when he thought of Rosamund ; but these feelings had not struck sufficiently deep to prevent his experiencing a genuine, if somewhat self-torturing pride and pleasure in what he considered the nobility of her nature, who could thus exalt and distinguish what was great, and shut her eyes to what were, after all, but trifling blemishes in her lover.

Thenceforth she had taken a new stand not only

in his opinion, but in his imagination. She had been constantly in his mind ; and, without envying Gilbert, he had found himself, he knew not why, disposed to stifle a sigh as he thought of the fortunate man.

But it had not been until repeated shocks had rudely shaken aside the veil, and revealed, beyond a shade of doubt, the naked, wretched truth with regard to his unhappy cousin, that he had learned all that was in his own heart.

Then, indeed, he had been petrified with horror and amazement to find himself instinct with a life of which he had never dreamed, and which insulted him and her alike by now throbbing and surging within. Permit it, encourage it, let it appear on the surface? Never. His first impulse had been to flee the place, and see neither one nor other of the betrothed pair again until after wedlock had made them one ; and this, had he thought only of himself, he would at once have carried into effect.

But such a course would, after all, only have healed his own wound (had it done as much), and would in no wise have bettered either Gilbert's or Rosamund's condition.

His absence or presence was a matter of no consequence to them, but their mutual attitudes toward each other were charged with an importance impossible to be overrated, and how either was to be warned or saved was the great—ought at least to be the great—consideration.

This sounds cold enough.

Hartland told himself he was as cool as a cucumber, and as impassive as a judge, while reasoning it all out.

For himself he and his feelings were nowhere—or, at any rate, were well in the background : he was smarting for his folly, and deserved to do so, and would get over it as he had done before ; but he did not like to think of Gilbert.

Whenever he thought of Gilbert it gave him a turn.

Whenever he saw Rosamund and her lover in each other's company, he cried out that the poor fellow was being befooled and betrayed.

Then he had set snares for his cousin, and she had fallen into them.

He had found out that she tossed her head and bit her lip at certain allusions. That she had no desire to pursue certain subjects. That she would have a sharp retort ready wherewith to parry certain questions.

If she were expected to be cognizant of any of the circumstances of Major Gilbert's life (she had known all about them at one time), she would now be as coldly ignorant as Lady Caroline herself could have been ; and if appealed to on the subject of his tastes and pursuits, she knew no more of these than of the others. The very mention of his name would bring to her face the same look that it had begun to assume at the sound of his voice.

The only wonder, then, was, as Hartland had himself said, that every one had not seen as clearly as he. He had been genuinely incensed by the absence of all control, the indecency, the inhumanity with which, to his mind, his fickle cousin had allowed the change in her affections to be manifest ; and dwelling on this sense of irritation and indignation, and losing sight of his own emotions for the nonce, he had fired off at her the sudden charge which had led to the scene above narrated. Lost in thought and retrospection, he now hurried along, aware that darkness was gathering, or rather had already gathered around but for the silvery light of a rising moon ; and so engrossing were his reflections that a loud "Holloa !" from behind was suffered twice to pass unresponded to.

The third repetition of the summons, however, was not to be ignored either consciously or unconsciously ; and turning his head he beheld the person from whom it had proceeded—namely, the young rector, his friend *Stoneby*, who had emerged from some wayside

cottage in time to catch a glimpse of and recognize the pedestrian who was on in front, but not to overtake him.

Truth to tell, Lord Hartland would at that precise moment have preferred to be alone.

Jack Stoneby was a good fellow, the best of fellows, his own particular parson, his right-hand cricketer, his nearest neighbor ; but he did not want Jack just then, he did not want anybody just then. And though Stoneby would neither interrogate him nor irritate him, though he was a man who could hold his peace and be content with dumb fellowship as few had the gift of being, still Jack was somebody, and nobody would have been welcome at the moment ; even a grasshopper would have been a burden. Involuntarily the young peer dropped an exclamation, and his brow contracted.

All through the coming evening he would have to talk to Lady Julia, and listen to her—all through the long, long evening ! And he did want to think over what had passed, and ponder on this phrase and that, and puzzle out the meaning of the whole. He did think he might have had this short half-hour for remembrance and conjecture. What ill luck had set Stoneby stirring at that time of night ? He should have been snug within his own four walls, beside his study fire, or partaking of his well-earned dinner. He should not be meandering out on a November evening at nearly seven o'clock.

"Holloa, you, I say !" began he, when the two were near enough for speech, "what are you doing out along the road at this time of night ? You will be as hoarse as a crow on Sunday, Mr. Parson, and then it will be the worse for us who have to come and hear you."

"That's all *you* think about, naturally," retorted Stoneby, joining him. "But it ought to console you to reflect that this being only Monday, if I have to submit to a mustard-plaster on my throat all to-night,

I have the rest of the week in which to get well. You have been at King's Common, I suppose?"

"Yes."

Nothing further, and the two stepped along, each unaware of what might be passing in the other's breast.

"What about your football on Saturday, Hartland?"

"It is to come off. The ground is all right."

"Not too wet?"

"A little wet, but this wind will dry it. We like a soft ground, so long as it is not under water."

"How about the team?"

"Oh, we shall do. No great things."

"Marks can play, can he?"

"Yes."

"Jenkinson?"

"Can't give a definite answer yet."

"And you have Jones, and Burrell, and Penridding. You ought to do pretty well."

"I think so."

If it had been the response of any one else, its lukewarmness, not to say dispiritedness, would have created some distrust in the hearer; but Stoneby, who took nearly as keen an interest in the subject as Hartland himself, knew his man, and rating his "I think so" at its true value, wondered at the indifference by which it was accompanied. Lord Hartland would not have said more had the event been an absolute certainty, and two days before Lord Hartland had been all anxiety and animation on the subject.

He now let it drop with an air of weariness, and the next instant began about something totally different. "They say that boy Gilbert saved has never been quite right since," he said. "Is it true?"

"He is in bed again to-day," replied Stoneby. "I was that way this afternoon, and looked in. He keeps ailing from one thing and another, and they think it is a matter of time his getting quite over it."

"Have they had a doctor?"

"Makin's assistant has been once or twice."

"Not Makin himself?"

"He is very busy, and has a lot on his hands just now."

"And they think there is nothing much amiss," said Hartland absently. He scarcely knew what he was talking about, but had a vague idea that talk was better than silence, and that Billy Barley was a safe topic.

"Oh no. The little fellow will grow out of it; he is young and hearty," said Stoneby, and another full stop ensued.

"Lady Julia quite well?" he inquired presently, when another three minutes had passed.

"Yes. Thanks."

"I saw your omnibus at the station, meeting the London train."

"She was not in it, though. It had been sent to meet some people."

"I am glad I did not stop the coachman, then. I wanted to see Lady Julia; but any day will do. I will walk over to-morrow or next day."

"She is sure to be in at luncheon time to-morrow."

"But she will be engaged with your visitors. Another day will do."

"The visitors were not for us," said Hartland; "they were for my cousin Rosamund. Our omnibus went because one of her horses is lame."

"Oh!"

"You will see them when you go to King's Common," proceeded Hartland; "it is Major Gilbert's sisters who have come to be introduced to the family, and make the acquaintance of their future sister-in-law."

"Have they? Oh, they will stop some time then, I suppose?"

"I suppose so."

"Are they—are they—what do they seem like? 1

mean, are they likely to be acquisitions to your circle?"

"Come, say out what you mean, Jack Stoneby," said Hartland, shaking his arm good-humoredly. "No need to put on fine phrases for me. You mean how will Rosamund get on with these Gilberts? I tell you frankly, I don't know; and I don't look forward ever to knowing; she will never tell." There was no mistaking the change in his air and tone. He was now aroused, interested, alert. He was going to pursue the subject.

"I did not see these new-comers," proceeded he, after a moment's pause, "but I shall to-morrow. So will you when you come, as you said you would. Come, and bring your sister. My aunt has asked the party from King's Common over."

"But your aunt may prefer having them by themselves?"

"I can answer for her that she will not. You will allow that I know Lady Julia? Well, come,—she will be more than pleased, she will be *relieved* to have you."

"Is that it?" said Stoneby, comprehending. "Then you may depend on us. I rather gathered that Lady Julia was not—that Major Gilbert was not a favorite with her. But you—you like him, don't you?"

"Like Gilbert?"

"I say, you like Gilbert, don't you?"

"I—I—I don't know, I am sure."

"My dear fellow, what is the matter?" cried Stoneby, laughing; "What makes you look at me in that way? I ask you a very simple question, and you look as perturbed as though I had propounded a problem of Euclid! At the same time, of course, I can understand that, as Gilbert is going to be a member of your family, perhaps you would rather not—"

—"Oh, rot!" said Hartland. "I could surely say to you what I think of a fellow, though he is going to marry my third cousin, once or twice removed. But *the fact is*, I—the question itself was a poser—I had

never really put it to myself. Come to think of it, I suppose I do like Gilbert. Certainly I admire him—or at least a great deal about him. He does not shine in many things; he is rather a nuisance in a house; but he is a good fellow, a very good fellow in the main. Oh, of course I must like *him*, though I may not exactly care for his society."

"I should think he is well-principled and conscientious."

"Oh, I should think so, certainly."

"And a good commanding officer."

"And likely to rise in the service."

"Clever."

"And popular."

"And good-tempered, and easy to live with," summed up Stoneby.

"For those who like good-temper and ease," rejoined Hartland. "Now you do, Jack; you know you do; so it is no use your hanging back, and looking up and down like that. Gilbert is just the sort of man to take your fancy, and you ought to stand by him and own it. Come now, don't be shabby; speak out."

Still Jack was silent.

"It's deuced hard on that poor fellow that *nobody* hereabouts likes him," said Hartland plaintively. "Why shouldn't we like him, you and I? Why shouldn't we like him, I say? It is not his fault. He does his best all round; and I am sure there is nothing he would not do to please. The trouble he has taken for me in several ways makes me quite ashamed, when I think of what a busy man he is, and what an idle fool I am; but the fact is, he could do the things and I couldn't. And he makes so light of the trouble, and is so cheerful over it, that I hardly know which way to look when I have to thank him, I feel so beastly cold and ungrateful. And I am sure, Jack, he always speaks most kindly of you. Only the other day he was sounding your praises; and he went over so far out of his way with a parcel for your sister last

night, though it was wet and cold, because he thought it was something she wanted particularly. I was there and saw it all. And there's Lady Julia, too," proceeded the speaker, "she who likes everybody, and who, I never thought, knew one from another—she has not a good word for him! When I bring him to the Abbey, she draws herself up, and is so laboriously polite, that it is quite oppressive. He is the only person with whom I have ever seen her in the least like—like poor Lady Caroline."

"Does he see it?"

"Not in the least. He told me the other day, with a wink, that he could always come round the old ladies. She had just been particularly bad to him."

"But Lady Julia's 'badness'—" began Stoneby, laughing.

"Oh, we know what it is, of course. I don't blame his want of perception *there*," said Hartland emphatically. To the surprise of his friend he was now frowning and biting his lip, while something evidently lay behind.

"After all," said Mr. Stoneby quietly, "none of this really signifies much, does it? It can not be of any real importance to Major Gilbert that he is not altogether popular among us. We have our own ways and habits. He has his, and his, I believe, serve him in very good stead among his brother officers and in society generally."

"Society? Hum!"

"His society. The society he habitually moves in. Soldiers are at home everywhere, you know—"

—"You telling me about soldiers! You are in a hole, my friend, and you are only blundering further and further in. I understand you perfectly. Gilbert's class is not ours, and that we have both found out."

"His true worth must outweigh that in the long run, Hartland."

"I have told myself so a hundred times," said Hartland *vehemently*; "it is what I have consoled myself

with over and over again. But, Stoneby, if—if it should not?"

"If it should not?"

"If—if—did it ever strike you, Jack, that it might be awkward for a man if his wife did not—eh?"

"His wife, Hartland? We were not speaking of a wife."

"I am now. Suppose the glamour were to wear off, and the wife—we'll say my cousin—supposing she did happen to feel about Gilbert as we do—"

"My dear Hartland, why suppose such a thing? In that case, what reason could she have had for accepting him?"

"True—very true; as you say, what reason! At the same time—by heaven!" exclaimed Hartland suddenly, "Lady Caroline had only herself to thank that it came to what it did. Any person of sense could have seen with a glance that it was a tug-of-war between mother and daughter, and Rosamund—poor Rosamund—won." His accents, which had begun by ringing out harsh and sharp, sank and faltered at the close. There was reality, passion, grief in every note. "I say, don't speak of this," he went on hurriedly, "don't you ever remember that I said it—unless—unless things should be different. But it's God's truth, Stoneby; that's what it is. That poor girl is entangled in a net woven by her own hands, and she will never, left to herself, cut her way out of it. What's worse, he is blind, and stupid, and deaf, and drugged to sleep by the intoxication of his own happiness. He can't see. He has no eyes to see. They have got themselves so completely caught—no, it is not '*they*'—'tis she alone who has played the fool. That's why I stand by Gilbert, d'ye see? I don't like him; I don't take to him; I shirk him; I get out of his way whenever I can,—but I am ashamed to look him in the face. He is a frank, straightforward, honorable fellow; and yet because he does not understand the tittle-tattle of the drawing-room and has—yes, he has a

beast of a laugh—I somehow never care to remain in the same room with him. And Rosamund—"he stopped short.

Stoneby said nothing.

"It is all very well for you," pursued the speaker,—"you have only to tell yourself that is no business of yours, and have done with it ; but I have to go over there day after day and see it going on—"

"Why do you go so often?"

"Why—why—why? Of course I go. I always have gone. It would seem very odd if I did not go. Why shouldn't I go?"

"Only if it pains you—"

"'Pains' me! Who says it 'pains' me? It disgusts and irritates me. It makes me mad with Rosamund, and unjust toward poor Gilbert. But that's my affair. I had rather be there and see it all, than stop away and know it's going on. That is what I can't do. I can not keep out of the way, and let this interloper have the run of the place. To see him strolling about now with his hands in his pockets, and his hat stuck on the back of his head—and to remember that less than two months ago he was but admitted to make a formal call, and that, had Lady Caroline lived, even this engagement would hardly have procured him intimacy—it is altogether too much. If he is to go about saying and doing all sorts of objectionable things, I must be there too—"

"Do you do any good?"

"Good? None whatever. Rather harm, I should say."

"Then again, why go?"

"Because—as I say—because—well, because I can't help it. I am a fool."

CHAPTER XXIII.

GILBERT UNDOES IT ALL.

"Quit, quit, for shame ! this will not move,
This can not take her :
If of herself she will not love,
Nothing can make her.
The devil take her."

—SIR JOHN SUCKLING.

"DID you hear that about the Abbey?" whispered Henrietta Gilbert to her sister, as soon as she conveniently could that evening. "We are to go over there to-morrow and take luncheon, and see the place ; so it must have been all nonsense about Lord Hartland."

"Sh," frowned Emily, glancing round in apprehension, for Etta's asides were by no means always inaudible. They were, however, at a safe distance from the rest of the party, having gone off together to inspect an old cabinet, and, under cover of so doing, exchange confidences. "Don't let them see us talking," further counseled she. "Etta, your waist-band is hanging down. I saw it directly you came into the dining-room ; stand still and let me tuck it up. How well Rosamund looks in black !" tucking vigorously. "I don't believe she could look better in colors ; it must be Frederick's fancy, because he never likes anything doleful."

"Did you notice how prettily the skirt was hung?" murmured Etta back ; "those large bunches falling so softly ? That is the new fashion. I wish we had seen it before we got these," somewhat ruefully. "I never did like the drapery of these, and mine is so dreadfully tight too. I can scarcely breathe."

"You will do yourself no good by wriggling about ; you should have had it seen to before you left. There ; the band is all right now, at any rate ; but do remember to fasten it another time."

"What shall we wear for to-morrow's luncheon, Em ?"

"Our bests, of course."

"The new plush skirts ?" said Etta, in a tone of awe.

"Of course. When could we have a better occasion for them ?"

"And if we are asked to walk about, and it comes on to rain ?"

"Nonsense. We got them to wear, not to lie in the cupboard. Frederick will expect us to look our best."

"Is Frederick going ?"

"Ask him now," as Frederick approached. He had detained his betrothed, alleging that she had done nothing but run away from him ever since he came, and had had his complaint allowed, and all his demands granted ; furthermore, the pretty diamond fly, which had waited for an opportunity to emerge from his waistcoat-pocket and settle on her fair neck, had been gratefully and timidly received, while the eyes that sank beneath his were, to his certain knowledge, suffused with moisture.

He had excused her following him into the room thereafter, and now made his way towards his sisters alone, and supremely happy.

"Eh ! what—what mischief are you two hatching ?" said he ; "whenever I see you two together, I know there's mischief in the wind. Am I 'going' ? 'Going' where ? One at a time—one at a time. Oh, to the Abbey, is it ? I have heard nothing of it ? Your own, or Rosamund's ?"

"Lady Julia Verelst's," replied Emily, with unction.

"Lady Julia has invited us all."

"For to-morrow, eh ? To what ? Dinner ?"

"Luncheon. Luncheon at two o'clock."

"Luncheon? That's a pity. I doubt whether I can get over to luncheon. When did the invitation come? Just now?"

"I don't know when it came; but Rosamund told us—or rather told me just now," said Henrietta. "She said it in a sort of off-hand way—'My aunt hopes to see us there at luncheon to-morrow,' and I saw the note handed to her, directly we came in here after dinner. It was lying about afterward. It was lying open, and I saw 'Do not be later than two,' for some reason or other. There it is now—"

"Well, well, never mind. I say you mustn't look into notes and things, you know."

"It was wide open, Frederick."

"Was it? I dare say. All right. But about my going, I am not so sure. I am glad you are to go. Old Julia always does the right thing. She is a rare jolly old bird, is Julia; and you will like seeing the Abbey, too. There is armor, and pictures, and things. Take care what you say about 'em all: people are touchy on family concerns, you know."

"You like Lady Julia? She is not like—the other one?" whispered Emily, somewhat anxiously.

"Not a scrap. No, indeed. Julia's the best of creatures. We are tremendous friends, Julia and I. I call on her whenever I am that way. She likes the attention, and, by Jove! she is the only one of all the women in this confounded neighborhood that I care to pay it to. They are the most capricious lot. There's Mrs. Waterfield for one. She seemed uncommonly nice and friendly to me the first time I went to pay my respects, and she is barely civil now,—as to making you free of her house, she wouldn't think of such a thing. I don't know whether my taking up in this quarter, instead of in hers, may not have had something to do with it, mind you: a woman with six daughters who don't go off ought to be forgiven a good deal,—and from the very first, every

one knew who it was I was bitten with. Well, but there are others besides her ; not people you know anything of. This is a stiffish bit of country to work. Even that long-backed parson Stoneby buttons up his coat when he meets you, as much as to say ' I keep myself to myself ' ; —the Stonebys are supposed to belong to a good family, —be hanged if I know who doesn't belong to a good family hereabouts ! —we shall have to belong to a good family ourselves, next."

"So we shall, very soon," said Etta archly.

"That is not 'belonging,' you goose. Never mind, it's all humbug ; one family is as good as another, I say. And the Stonebys aren't half bad when you get to know them, neither. I say, Rosamund," as she re-entered, "the girls must call on the Stonebys."

"I will take them wherever they would like to go," replied she, with that new-born gentleness still pervading her demeanor ; "we have but few neighbors, but they will all be very glad, I am sure," and she looked courteously round.

"There are the Waterfields," proceeded Gilbert, thus encouraged. "What Waterfields are there now at home?"

Could Rosamund but have answered "None!" She would have given much, very much at the moment, to have known and announced that her old friends were still absent ; but as it was, she was but too unfortunately well aware that all, even to Diana, had returned with their mother on the previous day.

Her Aunt Julia she had scarcely cared about, and the Stonebys were nothing to her, but she did for a moment shrink from presenting Em and Etta to the eyes of the fastidious Waterfields. In old days the Waterfields had been wont themselves to experience anxiety in bringing this or that stranger beneath the range of Lady Caroline's survey, —they had confided to herself their doubts and tremors, and had awaited the verdict from her sympathizing lips ; —if it had *been haughty disdain*, she had softened it down, —if

cold approbation, she had warmed it up ;—but all had by common consent submitted after a fashion their judgment to that of the omnipotent dame. Of course Rosamund had pouted and flouted ; of course she had tossed up her head, and given utterance to lordly protest and disbelief,—but with it all there had been a secret sense of superiority ; and that sense—strangely old and worn out as it seemed all at once to have become—embittered the present reversal of everything. In a moment she beheld her future sisters-in-law with Mrs. Waterfield's eyes, and her own dropped on the floor.

"That will be another 'out' for you," said Gilbert, reckoning up. "I should say the Waterfields are good for tea, or a luncheon—if not a dinner. No ; not a dinner, of course. No ; of course no one is dining out from this house at present. But they might go to tea, Rosamund ? What do you say ? Another tea and musical afternoon, like the first, eh ? What should you say to that ? Ah ! you two," turning to his sisters again, "you know nothing about that sort of thing yet. Oh dear, no ! Demure as two church mice. You wait a bit. We'll give you our experience by-and-by."

"Bestow a little of it upon us now, sir," petitioned Henrietta saucily—"that is, if Rosamund does not mind," for Rosamund had averted her head ; "What about that first afternoon ? What happened then ? Was it then you fell in—you know what ?" nodding delightedly.

"There now, if she has not hit the nail on the head, the monkey !" cried the fond brother in an ecstasy ; "Who told you that, you little pug-nosed thing ?" pinching the said feature. "I suppose you think yourself too clever to live, now."

"Let me go—ha ! ha ! ha !—let me go !" screeched Etta. "Get away, you nasty thing—"

"Etta, Etta," whispered Emily.

"He has made my nose red for the evening."

"Which it was before, and shining," retorted he.

"It was not," emphatically. "Was it, Em?"

"'Sh, 'sh, don't be so rough," was Em's rejoinder. "Can't you see Rosamund is not laughing?" in a low voice, as Rosamund moved away. "Do, Etta—do, Frederick—not set each other on. Do remember it is our first evening," admonished she, glancing apprehensively round. "Don't let us be herding together; and do, Etta, take care what you say. Talking about your nose! What will Rosamund think, if you begin like that?"

She need not have feared. Rosamund had not heard a word. Gilbert's opening appeal, with its allusion, had been enough for her, and had sent back her thoughts and memory to the past with a new pang, so fresh and startling that she herself recoiled from it.

Lord Hartland's denunciations had been like wine to her flagging energies. They had poured new life into her veins, and braced and strengthened every feeble nerve that had been drooping before. To impress him with a sense of her intention and fitness to carry out her own purposes, she had been ready to think no sacrifice too great,—but her lover was now every moment undoing all that another had done for him.

There he stood, and she could not but own him unchanged, unaltered—all that he had ever been. He had developed no vices, bared no hidden depths, sprung upon her no unsuspected and detestable traits of character. So far from this, she had not even learned any trifling inclinations, nor become familiar with any opinions or feelings which had not been boldly proclaimed at the outset. All with him had been open as the day: in her alone had been the change.

Heretofore she had been blind—now she saw.

The mist had cleared away, and in the terrible new-found daylight all that had before been but dimly viewed stood out unblenching.

Could she ever own it? Could her pride ever stoop to make so humbling an admission? Could her justice ever offer so hideous an insult?

Her lip trembled as at the moment came a peal of merry laughter from across the hearth, and it was a sob that she swallowed in her throat, when they thought she coldly turned away.

Gilbert, with an arm around each fondling sister, by turns whispering in the one ear and the other, felt as if he had allowed his old pets to usurp him too completely, as he also marked the retreating figure; and by no means ill pleased that his fair betrothed should seem to think the same, he now shook the others gayly off, and advanced to make his peace.

"They want me to tell tales," he cried, "but I know better. We can keep our own counsel, can't we, Rosamund? It is nothing to them whether or not it was a case of love at first sight is it?"

She smiled faintly.

"I shall never forget how you looked when you came in that day," proceeded he, sliding his arm round her waist despite a shrinking effort to evade it. "You fairly bowled me over then and there, as I have told you a hundred times since, haven't I? How those dull, sheep-faced Waterfield girls had not the sense to see what was up, I can't think. They would go on talking and singing to me. I tell you, Rosamund, I should never have taken up with one of them if there had not been another woman in the world."

"You don't suppose that they—" she stopped.

"Oh, we'll give 'em the benefit of the doubt. Only, you know, there are such a lot of them! and they do stand so deplorably in each other's light. However, Parson Stoneby might do for one, and I'll see if I can't do something among our fellows for another. As they are your friends—"

"Which you seem to forget," said Rosamund, struggling with her feelings. "I think, Frederick, you

might choose other subjects for your sarcasm than the oldest—almost the only friends I have."

"My sarcasm! Good gracious! my dear girl, I meant no sarcasm; be hanged if I did! I was in grim earnest, I assure you. I told them all at the barracks what nice girls the Waterfields were, and one or two went over, and liked them awfully; and it was only the fact of there being six of them,—come now, you know what I mean. I thought we had always agreed about the Waterfields: but you do turn round upon one so," deprecatingly. "We had not met each other three times when you confided to me how those girls bored you; and now—" and he rubbed his chin, and looked at her as much as to say, "and now, how is a poor fellow to know where the wind will shift to next?"

"Whatever I may say," replied Rosamund, unable to repress herself, "*you* have no right,—you ought to remember that in *you* it is a liberty. Pshaw! don't look like that," for his eyes had opened roundly. "I am grandiloquent, I suppose," forcing a laugh: "excuse it, please; it is an old trick of mine to stand up for the absent. Pray, let us say no more,—and pray, let me go," she added in an undertone, which had the immediate and desired effect.

("Hang it all! I wish those girls would not keep watching us, and pretending not to see," muttered the repulsed lover, aware that the twitch of a restive shoulder had emphasized the peremptory demand. "They will not understand that it is only her way. When I can get 'em alone for a good long talk, I must drop 'em a hint, once for all.")

It appeared that he could not accompany the party to the Abbey.

Two o'clock? No, he was certain he could not possibly manage it, as he had an appointment soon after three, and well he knew what two o'clock lunches meant. If the hour had been one, he might have had a try for it, and got off by half-past two; but,

after all, there would have been no depending even on a one o'clock luncheon at the Abbey. Aunt Julia, he supposed, hardly knew that such a virtue as punctuality existed ; and as there was no saying when they might get up again—and so on, and so on—considering which, he thought it best to give up the whole thing, since there was no sense in a scramble and a bother.

For the sake of the resolution at the end, Rosamund forgave him all that had gone before.

She had grown to mind even having Aunt Julia's little well-known foibles commented upon. It awoke resentment even to hear so much as a peccadillo noted in those whom she was fast learning to rank as her own people, with whom Major Gilbert had nothing to do, and of whom he had no business to speak : and the easy manner in which he on his part adopted all-relationships, and in especial the familiar intonation of his "Aunt Julia," was something in itself sufficient to provoke a most perplexing and unfortunate fit of the sulks. On such occasions he could not for the life of him think what he had done.

As often—more often than not, it would be something entirely to the good lady's credit which had been dropped, and yet he would see his mistress's brow grow black as night, and her eyes beneath gleam blue and threatening.

"She is so infernally sensitive, that is the only fault I have to find with her—and, after all, that's breeding," he would console himself. "There is no judging a thoroughbred by ordinary rules. I know that at bottom she is my own dear, jolly little girl ; and it will be no bad thing for the other fellows to find that Mrs. Frederick Gilbert means to keep 'em in their places. Dale's wife and Jekyll's wife won't be quite as thick with Lady Caroline Liscard's daughter as they suppose," and such a reflection was sufficient to restore immediate serenity.

He would even chuckle in anticipation of having a


wife whose spirit would do for him what he had never been able to accomplish for himself.

It had been one of the sources of his popularity that he could not give the cold shoulder to the tiresome and objectionable ; and that, though a sufficiently strict regimental major, and thoroughly capable of maintaining military order and discipline when within barracks—at other times and in other places he was in no respects formidable ; and he was secretly aware that it would add to his dignity to be more reserved, important, and exclusive.

His marriage would do this for him. A married man, aided and abetted by his wife, could take a new departure ; and when, added to this, there was the having wedded a granddaughter of the family held in first repute in the neighborhood, every one would see that he had a right to a step in the social scale. Had Rosamund been the heedless, flighty young girl he had at first found her, she might indeed have charmed, but she could never have awed ; whereas now !—and he felt that now she could awe even himself. Unfortunately, as we know, the forbearance engendered by these agreeable ruminations was thrown away upon its object.

Rosamund would now scarce make an effort to conceal displeasure or annoyance ; and thus on the present occasion, when it was a question of his going or not going to the Abbey, whereas he himself debated the *pros* and *cons* with all imaginable earnestness, his sisters meantime hanging on every breath, as if on the event depended all their promised pleasure—the one who should, who ought to have been at least as, if not more, deeply interested than any, yawned almost in her lover's face, hummed a tune only half inaudibly, and the moment the conclusion was arrived at, introduced another topic without a syllable of demur or regret.

The good effects of the garden scene were passing away.



Why should she regret, forsooth? She had never asked him to go. He had never been invited. Who was to say that Lady Julia even wished for his company?

As a matter of fact she knew very well that Lady Julia wished for nothing of the kind; and on Miss Gilbert's eager presentation of her brother's apology on the following day, this was allowed to be tolerably apparent.

"My brother bade me say how extremely sorry he was to be prevented coming with us," began Miss Emily, to whom the message had been intrusted, and who had undertaken to deliver it, nothing doubting. "He has a very important engagement at three o'clock, and as he could not be sure of getting back to Longminster by that time, he felt it would be wise to give up coming at all. He hoped you would be so kind as to excuse him, Lady Julia."

Lady Julia looked at the speaker. If she had given utterance to what was in her heart, she would have said, "And who are you to inform me of all this? Had any apology been required—which was not the case, since I never asked, nor meant your brother to come—it was not your place to make it."

As, however, this must be for herself alone, she could outwardly only take refuge as her niece before her had done, in a look of satisfaction almost too obvious to escape notice.

She had scarcely dared to hope that Major Gilbert would not come. He would certainly not hesitate about a welcome. He had shown too often already that he knew his privileges and meant to claim them, for any bashfulness to arise at this period.

More than once during the past weeks he had put in an appearance just when she was sitting down to table at two o'clock, and had eaten a partridge and a couple of roast apples—her favorite luncheon—with the appetite of a healthy and the appreciation of a hungry man. Sometimes, ere she could get out in the

morning he would be tapping at the pane of her boudoir window with his walking-stick, asking for a message for King's Common, or a companion on his walk thither. The Abbey lay between Longminster and King's Common, therefore it was scarce a ten minutes' loss to run up to the house and back ; and, as he had told his sisters, he fancied Lady Julia liked the attention. As a fact it worried her beyond everything. She never felt safe from him. She would find him, on her return from her afternoon drive, comfortably ensconced in an easy-chair over the drawing-room fire, perusing the newspaper. He would sometimes dash in later still, quite late, on his way back, after dining with the Liscards, for no reason, as it appeared, whatever. He liked to think he was at home at the Abbey—that was the real truth ; and as he had never fully awakened to the fact that he was not, he imagined that it only needed perseverance to make him so. "I am looked upon quite as one of the family already," had been an early boast, but he still felt the necessity of making it good on every possible occasion. On the present one, his regrets had been doubled, since they were not only for his own and Rosamund's benefit, but for that of his sisters also ; and in the delivery they lost none of their importance, not even the slightness of Lady Julia's "Indeed?" nor her serene dismissal of the subject, being sufficient to overturn it.

"My brother said he knew you would understand. His time is not his own. He is not his own master," proceeded the deputy volubly ; "at least that is what he told me to say,—for of course there is at present no one over him at the garrison. He has been in command there for some months. But the gentleman who has made the appointment is coming from London ; and my brother has to meet at a certain time—"

"No doubt. I quite understand." Even the tender-hearted Lady Julia was obliged to exert herself. "*Rosamund, my love !*" turning to her niece—

but having got so far, the good lady suddenly found she had nothing to go on with.

She had felt absolutely obliged to put an end to Miss Gilbert, but not being versed in incivility, the attempt had almost ended in a dead-lock. "You walked, I suppose?" came at length in a somewhat lame conclusion.

There was no doubt about their having walked; their boots and skirts were mud-stained, and their cheeks—all but Rosamund's—were rosy and blooming. The contrast appeared suddenly to strike Lady Julia.

"You look quite tired, dear child," she added tenderly. "You have not been walking much of late. Still, the distance is not great," and again she glanced uneasily at the slight figure, which drooped wearily into a chair, while the hat fell back from a forehead paler than its wont, round which the dark, moist rings of hair bestrewed themselves.

"I think I am a little tired, Aunt Julia."

"And—and warm," said her aunt, leaning over her. "Yet the day is not very warm. Your hands are so hot—"

"Oh, never mind them."

"And—and—"

"Leave me alone; there's a darling!" whispered Rosamund. "I—I don't think I am quite well to-day."

"Not well? Cold? Sore throat? Headache, my love! There is a great deal of illness about, and Dr. Makin has several cases of scarlet fever in the village. He told me so yesterday. Oh, my dear child, I do trust you have not taken scarlet fever. You might easily have caught the infection, either at church or school—"

—"Would God I had!"

So low and anguished was the cry, that it escaped every ear but that on the strain to catch it; but the effect on Lady Julia was all that might have been expected.

She saw,—she saw at last.

The shuddering accents, the exceeding bitter moan, with its accompaniment of averted eye and trembling lip,—oh, what else could it mean than the one thing—misery of heart and mind, not of the mere body?

And then, in an instant, all that Hartland had ever said or pointed at rushed back upon her amazed and awakened recollection, sharp and distinct, now that the lightning-flash of revelation had struck it.

He had *hinted* that Gilbert was not appreciated, not beloved as he ought to be; and such must indeed be the case.

But—not beloved? That meant as much to her—or so she fancied—as to the unhappy wretch himself. It meant—it meant—oh, what did it not mean?

And she could do nothing, say nothing, and learn no more at this most unfortunate moment—a moment which, under other auspices, might have been laden with meaning and result! Rosamund's convulsive brow, her despairing whisper and indrawn breath must have been the outcome of a great internal convulsion, not to be altogether repressed; and who could tell what might not have been allowed or betrayed had she but been permitted to have had the opportunity to herself? Could she but have held her darling to her heart, and pleaded for a confidence! Of late, confidence had been withheld—and that for the first time in Rosamund's young life. Was it now to be restored and renewed, or— She started forward and welcomed Clementina Stoneby by kissing her on both cheeks; and it was by the merest chance that she just missed kissing Miss Stoneby's brother also.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TO-DAY SHE CARED FOR NO ONE.

"It is hard to personate and act a part long ; for where truth is not at the bottom, nature will always be endeavoring to return, and will peep out and betray herself one time or other."—TILLOTSON.

LADY JULIA had, as we have said, been rendered so insensible to the outward scene by her own internal emotions, that she narrowly escaped outraging all propriety by saluting her parish priest on the spot with the kiss of charity ; and even had he taken advantage of her bewilderment, and presented his close-shaven cheek for the embrace, she would not only have bestowed it without hesitation, but would have been completely oblivious of having done so then and thereafter.

The very ground she trod on seemed to shake beneath her.

She had been to the full as much rejoiced as Hartland had known she would be, to hear that he had secured the Stonebys' support for the occasion ; yet she beheld them enter not only without any token of joy, but with a dazed and stupefied air, as though wondering what chance had sent them her way that morning—and presented them to the Miss Gilberts, and watched the readjustment of the circle as though it concerned anybody rather than herself.

Her heart—if not her eye—was for that listless form in the background,—that wreck of what had once been her bright, bold Rosamund. What havoc had here in a few brief weeks been wrought ! Oh, how strange that it had been suffered to pass unmarked and unacknowledged before ? Oh, how cruelly neglectful had she been !

Yet had the fond creature paused to weigh the matter, and cast her eye backward in the new light thus shed upon the past, she might have found wherewith to excuse herself. Rosamund, indifferent to what all others thought, had made an effort, faint enough in truth, but still an effort, toward keeping up appearances when in the presence of her aunt—and had succeeded only too well. Only to-day, and only as it were at this eleventh hour, was the mask dropped. To-day the unhappy girl cared for no one.

The sociability of the rest of the party, however, came to the aid of Lady Julia; Miss Gilbert was being attended to by Mr. Stoneby, Henrietta by his sister; all looked well satisfied, and in no need of their hostess. She had time to collect herself, to remember that for the present she had a part to play, and to endeavor to thrust into a corner the tumultuous tide of inquiry and research which had burst in upon her with such sudden and overwhelming force.

How placid the rest of the party looked! How easy and informal was the group! It had not occurred to either Rosamund or Clementina to change their usual morning frocks; and indeed the neat gray homespun, and the plain black merino, were alike suited to the weather, the roads, and Lady Julia herself. Lady Julia was likewise in her everyday gown, her "paramatta," with its crape somewhat too deep to please her maid, who loved to be in the fashion.

There was no one, therefore, to interfere with the glories of Emily and Henrietta, who, resplendent in claret velvet and plush, with smartly twisted hats, a vast amount of neckerchief and handkerchief, and perfectly spotless gloves, were happily conscious of being by far the finest folks in the room.

It must be owned that those gloves gave one person present a pang. Clementina had by mistake caught up a very old pair, worn at the tips and short of buttons; but she had comforted herself with the certainty that Rosamund would not be able to cast a

stone at her in this respect. Rosamund was so much in the habit of running over to the Abbey at all times and seasons, that as it was merely going from one little woodland path to another for a short mile, no addition was required to her garden toilet; and she had begun to disdain gloves as soon as she disdained Miss Penrose.

True to herself, she sat hatless and gloveless now.

But on the other hand, the spruce, suburban young ladies were a treat to behold, from the neat gold bands round each daintily ruffled throat, to the shining heels on each delicately pointed, patent-leather boot.

The heels indeed shone in adversity—as lanterns in the dark. They had been cruelly used, those poor boots; they had been forced through miry, briary ways; and, soft and moist, scarcely showed to the advantage they should have done, beneath costumes so elegant.

“What can Rosamund have been thinking of?” was the first and very natural thought which occurred to the country parson’s sensible little sister, with a glance at her own stout and serviceable foot-gear. “She has allowed these poor girls to trick themselves out as if for a lounge in a London park, and has then trotted them through the short cut here, though it is one long sop! And only to lunch with Lady Julia, too! Lady Julia, who wears her old clothes longer than any other woman in the parish! And Rosamund has not taken a bit of pains with herself. She looks tumbled, disheveled, and—oh dear!—how cross and unhappy! I think she has not looked happy at all of late. I wonder—” but then she had to attend and reply to Henrietta, who had put forth a sentiment, and further wonder and conjecture had to be adjourned. Henrietta was next to her, and, truth to tell, it was a pity that the chairs were so close together, and that both were in the full light of the largest window. *Miss Stoneby’s* gloves looked simply disgraceful. She

smuggled one hand under the cover of a small table near, and took out her handkerchief and held it crushed up in the other, and so did her best. If she could have but taken them off, like Rosamund! But she was not in a relation's house, and Clementina needed no one to teach her to behave nicely. "Quite a little gentlewoman," had been Lady Julia's speedy verdict after the preliminary interview; and even Lady Caroline had not demurred to the phrase, but had only hoped in private that Hartland did not think so likewise.

If Hartland had ever thought about it at all, her laborious efforts to satisfy her curiosity would in all probability have produced their natural fruits; but beginning by being indifferent, he had remained so. He had on this occasion only waited for the Stonebys' coming to present himself, and would have allowed as much if any one had asked him, for sister and brother had an artificial importance at the moment very different to any Lady Caroline had ever dreaded. What she had once longed for, plotted for, and well-nigh despaired of, had actually, and within the briefest of periods, come to pass—Rosamund, and Rosamund only, now occupied Hartland's thoughts. He had parted from his cousin on the previous evening in such fashion as made it impossible that they could meet again without some confusion, some consciousness; and she, on her part, had felt almost certain that he would not risk a meeting at all. All through the long, weary, hot, and feverish hours of the past night, when either dozing or dreaming fitfully, or lying with eyes wide open, gazing into the moonlight of a cloudless sky, the scene she had gone through—that strange scene within the dim shades of hedge and laurel, with all its bitters and its one sweet—had been ever present to her. She had in fancy heard herself speaking as she had never spoken—had only longed and burned to speak,—delivering the scornful defiance, the *crushing sarcasm*, the flat denial which would

have so utterly put him to rout—if only, only she could have uttered it.

All the words she might have said, and had not said, or had not been able to say, had crowded in all too late upon her; how came it that she had been so slow, so stupid, so cowardly at the time? How had she not silenced her accuser at the outset with one of those swift and sharp tit-for-tats which had ever been handy on her tongue? She had let him say things which she could never forget. His whole bearing she could never forget. It had made a breach between them which could never be healed. And all the time, and far beneath this boiling, bubbling current of wrath, there had rung two notes of the sweetest music; and “dear Rosamund” had atoned for all.

A deep flush mounted to her brow, as Hartland now entered, and presently approached her.

Taught by Lady Julia, he had already made his bow to the strangers, lingered a moment by Clementina Stoneby, and nodded and smiled to her brother; and then—when he could no longer avoid doing so—he made his way slowly up the room to where Rosamund sat apart.

The two hands met, but neither looked at the other. Stoneby, who had happened to turn his head that way, felt a curious sensation at the moment.

He had thought, until within a few hours ago, that he knew Lord Hartland as himself. By putting two and two together, he had been perfectly cognizant of the family arrangement, which, if it had been carried out, would have secured an ample fortune and a fair bride to his friend, and while he had perhaps secretly marveled at Hartland’s rejection of both, he had respected his disinterestedness.

It was strange, it was passing strange that he, that any one could resist that bewitching creature,—alas! poor Jack—and many a time and oft had the gentle scholar mused over the ways and dealings of that mysterious over-ruling Providence which would at times

seem to mock with its gifts, by offering them to those who value them not, while others, eager and longing, behold them afar off. But now it seemed on a sudden that the end had not been yet come at.

That there was a shadow, an embarrassment in the meeting between the cousins, he felt instinctively ; and for it, Hartland's confessed antipathy to Gilbert scarcely accounted.

What Hartland had said of Rosamund herself flashed through his mind. At the time he had not given it serious consideration ; he had thought it wild talk ; and had told himself that the speaker, misled by his own feelings, had been carried too far. But in spite of himself, he now experienced a cold misgiving. He thought he must make a venture, in order to lay it to sleep. Gilbert (no doubt incited thereto by his betrothed) had that morning sent him a handsome check for the relief of a poor family in the parish upon whom great distress had fallen.

He would go up to Miss Liscard now, and speak handsomely of the liberal-minded donor.

It might be that the benevolent action had merely proceeded from a desire to stand well with the Liscards, whose tenants the sufferers were,—it might be that the money was the mere overplus of a full purse, to be scattered lavishly by a prosperous lover in his hour of triumph,—it might, on the other hand, proceed from a higher motive ; but from whatever source sprung, the gift was a valuable and generous one, and it would be only seemly that he should speak of it, and speak with gratitude.

"I suspect I have to thank you for the great pleasure I received this morning," he accordingly began, drawing near, when it had become plain that his host was standing mutely aside, and that nothing more was going to be said or done for the nonce. "I never was more surprised, and it is really too kind of Major Gilbert."

"What is too kind?" said Rosamund, scarcely lifting her eyes.

She would have answered more civilly if he had introduced any other name.

"His handsome donation. No doubt you were the kind promoter—"

"I have heard of no donation," interrupted she, as cold as ice.

"Indeed! Oh, I certainly thought I could not be mistaken as to whom I was indebted."

No answer.

"He did not even tell you he was going to send it?"

"No. Why should he? I don't know what you mean. What has Major Gilbert"—(it appeared as if the very name came out with an effort)—"been doing?"

"All that is kind and praiseworthy, I assure you.

But," reflecting, "I hope I am not breaking confidence. Perhaps I should not have spoken"—as a sudden remembrance of a rapid scrawl in postscript, "Oblige me by not mentioning this," dawned upon him. Could it have been really meant to be acted upon? To tell the truth it had never once occurred to him that the writer had so meant it.

Now Gilbert had. In matters of business he was strictly business-like, and to underline, emphasize, and repeat was not his way. In simply adding the above brief clause, he had thought he had done sufficient to insure the wish being attended to. "Dear me!" said Jack, feeling rather ashamed of himself, "it really did not occur to me that he had intended I should keep it from you."

At last he had succeeded, and her curiosity was piqued.

"When you *have* told me, Mr. Stoneby," quoth Rosamund with a flash of her old vivacity, "it will be time enough to decide whether you ought to have done it or not. Pray, then let us hear this wonderful secret."

"Will you stand between me and Major Gilbert if I reveal it?"

At that moment she looked as if she would not have stood between anybody and Major Gilbert—as if his very presence would have sent her from him, driven her forth, it mattered not where.

"This is absurd," said she, starting to her feet; and Lady Julia's "Luncheon, my dear," and her tender drawing of her niece's hand within her arm the next moment, seemed as the shelter to which the impetuous girl had sprung.

"You want your luncheon, don't you, love?" whispered the kind aunt, giving the aforesaid hand a little pressure; "not very bright to-day, I can see, darling." Then lower still, "I will try to like them, Rosamund—I will really try; and they are very nice, I am sure, are they not?" added she, scarce knowing what she said, in a vague desire to comfort and cheer.

Rosamund gave a little laugh. As if anything now could do any good! What were poor Em and Etta to her? They were but small parts, fractions of the hopeless, miserable whole.

They were now on in front, reluctantly leading the way, or, to speak more correctly, being herded onward by those behind, whom they in vain attempted to let pass.

Little Clemmy Stoneby, stumping sturdily alongside, being quite aware that she and they were in their right order of precedence, marveled much at their uncertain, wavering movements and wistful countenances; but she could not impart to them any of her own composure.

Like their brother, they were thrown out by anything new and unfamiliar; and as they had never before seen so stately an affair conducted so simply, it was not until all were seated, and the blinds had been drawn down because the sun had come out and was in Henrietta's eyes, that they severally began to recover. One was on each side of the host; Mr. Stoneby sat on

Lady Julia's right hand, Rosamund opposite to him, and next her was Clementina, pulling off her shabby little gloves as fast as she could, and with her round, good-humored face restored to its wonted serenity by the process. Her mind was now at rest—and perhaps as much could not have been said of any one else present.

The Miss Gilberts were, however, in a state of alternate anxiety and elation, divided betwixt astonishment at their present exceeding good luck and their desire to comport themselves creditably under it. They had not of themselves selected these favored seats; and having merely obeyed by instinct the authoritative glance of the old major-domo, and the footman's significant drawing back of the chairs in question, they had no qualms of conscience on that head.

The only thing was, they did hope that Rosamund knew how it had been done, knew that they had not been to blame, that they had not encircled Lord Hartland thus of their own free will. They had begun to stand in considerable awe of their future sister-in-law, and found that every hour increased rather than diminished the feeling. If she had frowned and looked indignant at this crisis, it would have been unfortunate indeed.

But they could not catch her eye at all; she was dreamily gazing through the great bay-window, and they came to the conclusion finally that they had nothing to fear. Their spirits rose; and with a young man, and a nice young man, and a peer of the realm, to talk to, they could talk against anybody. Henrietta, as usual, led the way.

"What a lovely country this is, Lord Hartland; and what a lovely place King's Common is! Such lovely gardens,—and such a lovely park,—and that lovely old avenue,—and—oh, it is all so lovely!"

"You are not seeing it at its best," replied he good-humoredly. "It is kind of you to be so charitable. We think it looks a little dreary just at this time."

"Indeed, I can not believe it could ever look dreary," cried she, "nor this lovely Abbey neither. Emily and I said so to each other ever so often to-day, did we not, Emily? Rosamund said she thought it dull."

"Did she?" he stole a long, furtive glance up the board, but Miss Henrietta was helping herself to potatoes, and did not see it.

"Only King's Common, of course. Oh, not the Abbey,—not *your* place," explained she swiftly; "but I am sure it is because Rosamund is not very well this autumn. My brother thinks the shock upset her; so naturally she takes a gloomy view of things."

"Yes."

"*We* don't think it dull; we never saw anything prettier than those trees we passed under to-day. They were perfectly red all over; and that lovely view from the white gate."

"Oh, you came that way. You must have found it wet under foot."

"It was, rather; but then it was so lovely. Emily, where did Rosamund say that lovely path led to? All the way to some place three miles off—what was it?"

"I dare say Lord Hartland can tell you, considering the path leads through his own woods, and belongs to himself," observed Emily severely. ("Just like her, the stupid thing!") "How charming it must be," turning affectedly to him, "to be able to walk on and on forever in your own woods! Rosamund says you can walk about all day and never re-cross the path."

"They are nice enough in summer,—I should have preferred the road myself to-day."

"We did get rather torn and dirty. The bramble-branches were so long, and stuck to us."

"Followers, you know," tittered Etta, growing coquettish. Could she have known what a vision the little word recalled! Hartland, who was pouring himself out a glass of water, raised his eyes, dropped them again, and then behind the tumbler which he held to

his lips, took a second long, stolen, earnest look at his cousin. That old, old scene of the "follower"! That pleasant walk! That merry talk! That time when he might—oh, he had let it all pass; and now the "follower" held on, and he could not tear him off, as he could once have done,—as he *had* done,—as—For full a minute the present scene was lost in the past.

Before the meal was over, he had looked at Rosamund many times. He could not tell what to think about her.

At one time the soft, curved, pear-shaped cheek next him would be suffused in deepest crimson, at another pale as death,—one moment she would be talking fast and eagerly, at another lost in reverie,—but two things she never did: she neither tasted a morsel of the food before her, nor did she once turn her head his way.

"She will never forgive me," was his conclusion.

Emily Gilbert had now turned to Clementina, and was doing her best to talk of parish matters, and betraying a large share of kindly ignorance on the subject.

There were but few really poor people round her own home, she averred; most of the people were well-to-do small tradespeople and artisans, a good many of whom had employment in divers large works near.

They had no cottagers, no laborers; oh no, they lived far too near London for that: in fact they called themselves Londoners: ten minutes took them to a London station.

For her part she loved the country. How delightful it must be to live in such a pretty neighborhood as this, for instance!

And what a sweetly pretty church! Would Miss Stoneby take them over it some day? Oh, any day would do. Next week, perhaps. They were not going away just yet. And the cottages! Those low, thatched roofs, so curiously close down over the win-

dows and doors, how cosy, how comfortable they looked, and so picturesque !

"More picturesque than comfortable," replied downright Clementina. "Unless those thatched cottages are kept in thorough repair—which is constantly being needed, and very expensive to have done—they are not weatherproof. Lord Hartland's cottages are always well looked after," she added, with a smile to him, for some vigorous repairs, in which the parson's sister had been keenly interested, had just been carried out ; "but I can not say the same for our other landlords. We have a sad case in point. A portion of a roof fell in the other night, in the midst of that hurricane of rain and wind, and it broke the furniture all in pieces, and the poor man who was in bed in the next room, too ill to move, had to lie there hour after hour, expecting that every blast would bring down the remainder of the roof upon his own head."

"Was there no one to move him? Why, I would not have let him lie still there," cried Miss Gilbert, who was energetic like her brother, and who was quite equal to having carried forth the invalid in her own arms, and would, moreover, certainly have done so, had she been by.

"There was no one in the house but two small children. His wife died some time ago, and the person who looked after him had chosen to take herself off for the night."

"The wretch! Surely, Miss Stoneby, you won't let her go back?"

"No, indeed," said Clementina, pleased with the interest her little tale had aroused, for now all the table was listening. "We have taken means to prevent that. And some one else, Miss Gilbert, has done more than any of us. Your brother—"

"I declare I was thinking of Frederick. I was wishing he could hear you. He would be sure to give you something. You catch him, and tell him what

you have told us, Miss Stoneby, and you see if he does not give you something."

"I don't need to wait for that," quoth the pleased and amiable Clemmy, looking round with a glow of anticipated triumph in her forthcoming announcement. "You have shown how well you know your brother, and how correctly you judge what he would do. He sent Jack a ten-pound note for the poor man this morning."

There was a general murmur of applause.

"There now, that was Frederick all over," observed Henrietta, when the hum had died out. "He never waits to be asked twice, does he, Em? We think a good many times before we try to get anything out of him, Em and I, just because he is so good-natured. And when it's for any charity or collection, though he teases ever so much first, he always gives us something good at last."

"And he never says a word about it," added Emily; "he will never tell us a word about this ten-pound note, will he, Etta?"

("Dear me!" reflected Jack Stoneby, all parson at the moment, "how I wish I had known of this worthy gentleman's proclivities before! I must certainly—yes, I certainly must make up for lost time now, however.")

("Another in the eye for me," reflected Lord Hartland at the same instant. "But if I have got to like Gilbert, I vow Jack has got to like him too. And as for Rosamund—Rosamund shall *not* marry him.")

CHAPTER XXV.

A MISERABLE HOUR.

"Nought is there under Heaven's wide hollownesse
That moves more deare compassion of the mind
Than beauty brought t' unworthie wretchednesse
Through envie's snares or fortune's freaks unkind."

—SPENSER.

ROSAMUND did not indeed look a bride for any one the next minute.

She had been absently paring a russet apple on her plate, having taken no part in the foregoing discussion, when on a sudden the fruit knife dropped from between her fingers, her cheek crimsoned with a deep, widespread stain, and an exclamation of surprise—almost of anger—escaped her.

Others at the same moment turned their heads, for there in the doorway, which a footman had just thrown open, stood Major Gilbert himself, all eagerness and happy explanations. His appointment had been put off to another day; he had received the telegram postponing it an hour before, on the arrival of which he had at once ordered his trap and driven over at the best rate he could, knowing he should be late, but feeling confident of catching up the party at some point of the luncheon, and being able to make up speedily for lost time. To suppose for an instant that he had by any chance not done the right thing was the very last idea that would have occurred to him: he had counted on the joy his tardy appearance would occasion, all the way as he came along.

"Anything will do," he said heartily; "but I did not think you would have got on so far," looking round on the blue-and-gold dessert-plates. "Are you not rather exceptionally punctual to-day?" to his

hostess. "To tell the truth, Lady Julia, I was shabby enough to confide in my sisters yesterday that the Abbey was not of all places the one most noted for punctuality. I had been reckoning on that, I am afraid. Well, Rosamund, so here you are," patting her shoulder as he passed to his chair from shaking hands all round the table. "And so you all got here safe and sound? Dirty work walking to-day, eh? Or did you drive?"

"We walked."

"But you will not walk back, my love," interposed Lady Julia, beginning to recover herself. She, in common with all present, had experienced a certain shock at the unlooked-for interruption. The shock—of pleasure to his two sisters—of mingled pain and curiosity to the rest, had been succeeded by a suspension of everything, a numbness,—and it was well that Gilbert himself was so ready and able to cover this. Lady Julia, as we have said, was the first to recover, and even she recovered slowly and reluctantly. She felt as if she could never forgive the intrusion, and yet she knew she must forgive it, must at least seem not to see, nor to consider it as such,—it was, it must be looked upon but as the prelude to many more. As for Rosamund, the kind creature would not look at her darling, so sure she felt that they were once more in sympathy, as they had ever been. It was terrible—terrible.

"You will not walk back, my love," said she lightly; "you can have any carriage from here that you like, you know, in case you forgot to order one from home."

"Thank you, dear Auntie,"—always gentle and soft to *her*,—"but I did order one; I told them to send the pony-chaise."

"But the pony-chaise only holds two?"

"It will hold Emily and Henrietta. I should not drive at any rate; I have not had walking enough lately, as you all tell me."

"For that very reason you must not overdo it; no, no, we will see about that"—("and I shall have her to myself," thought Lady Julia exultingly, "and perhaps, who knows—?")

"—Not much seeing needed," cried Major Gilbert's lusty, jovial tones. "I thought that was going to be the way of it, and so I prepared a little surprise for that young lady, if she will deign to accept it. What do you think I have got here, Rosamund? Can you guess? Oh, I think you can. What but my own bonny bays again!" in evident expectation of creating a sensation. "Going as sweetly as ever. So we'll trundle the girls out of the way in the pony-chaise, and then you will mount to your own perch on the dog-cart, and we'll have a scamper. You have no idea how she likes driving tandem, Lady Julia. You tell her, Rosamund," nodding across the table. "You did not know what luck was in store for you. No more did I, till this morning. I thought that foreleg would not have been right for some days yet."

"You are surely not thinking of driving my niece in a high tandem dog-cart to-day?" demanded Lady Julia, with displeasure.

"Why not?" said Gilbert, with his mouth full and his fork midway. He was eating fast, to make up for lost time, and it is difficult to eat fast and talk fast at the same time.

"She is not fit," protested Lady Julia, still frowning. "She—"

"I am quite fit," said Rosamund perversely.

"My dear, you are not. You have not been well lately, and you owed to me when you came in that you were tired."

"The air is all she wants," interposed Gilbert; "air is the very thing for her. That was why I was so jolly glad about the horses. I mean to drive her every day I can, now that the dark bay is all right again. You tell your aunt, Rosamund, that it is the best thing in the world for you."

"Young people do not always know what is best," said Lady Julia stiffly. "If Rosamund had been as strong as usual it would have been different ; but—"

"Let her speak for herself. Let her say what she likes," cried Gilbert, not meaning to be rude, but anxious to have the matter settled. "I brought the pair on purpose ; but it's no matter. One of the girls can go with me, if she's not up to it ; only I thought that Rosamund—" and he looked wistfully into her face. She was always the first with him, be the other who it might ; and a pang shot through the heart of one, at least, present who marked and understood the poor fellow's earnest gaze. Hartland smothered an exclamation, when the cold rejoinder came at last.

"I should certainly prefer the dog-cart to the pony-chaise if it be a choice of evils," said Rosamund sullenly ; "if so it is decreed that I am to drive, let me drive in the dog-cart. But why I may not do as I choose, I can not see. I said I preferred walking. I am sure walking would be far better for me. You all make out I am to do what is best for me, and yet I am not to be allowed to do the very thing that is !"

"All right ; then we'll walk," cried Gilbert, giving in at once, with the utmost kindness. "I'll send the cart on to King's Common—David can take it—and I will escort you back. There, will that do?" and he looked as if he had cut the knot cleverly, and pleased every one.

If he had, he was not permitted to think so long.

"Surely I need not be such a bugbear to you all ! Surely this need not be made such a fuss about, and such a business of !" cried Rosamund, in a high, sharp voice. "It is perfectly ridiculous for us all to be planning and discussing a mere nothing, as if it were a matter of life and death"—drumming impatiently upon the table. "Why may I not do as I always used to do, and trouble nobody ? I never needed any 'escort' home from here ; why should I begin all at once to be so particular ? Do, Aunt Julia, let us

come," still more impatiently; "we can not be required to stay on here forever. Here are Hartland and Mr. Stoneby to watch Major Gilbert eating his luncheon, and it seems years since we had ours—!"

"—My dear child!"

Even Lady Julia was shocked.

"Dear Rosamund, you—you forget yourself," she murmured, for Rosamund had already pushed back her chair. "My dear child—dear love, do remember." Then louder, "No, Major Gilbert, pray don't hurry—pray do not think you are keeping us here. Indeed none of us wish to go in the least; it is only that dear Rosamund feels the heat of the room a little, is it not, love? The room is very hot, certainly. The sun has been on it all day, and the day is too mild for that large fire. The fire is quite too large. I feel it myself; and the weather is unseasonable, altogether unseasonable for November."

"I have been wanting particularly to see you, Gilbert," added Hartland, doing his part next. "I am making some alterations in the stables, and the builder is to be over this afternoon; so it is quite a piece of luck your being here at the same time. I had almost written asking you to meet him, but I let the post-time slip by."

"And I too should have written," put in Jack Stoneby, who had only waited till the others had done, and who, as he was sitting next the major, could say his say without being obtrusive. "I received your note this morning, and I can not tell how to thank you enough. Your generosity—"

Gilbert kicked his foot beneath the table. He did not know that his generosity had been already proclaimed.

All who could had now done their best toward atoning for Rosamund's insolent assault, and her heart swelled with resentment against each one.

Why should she not say what she chose, be unfeeling, ungrateful, and rude, if she pleased, toward her

lover? Gilbert was hers—not theirs. Surely she might do as she would with her own; and all that she had done and suffered on his behalf rose up as usual to justify her. She now longed to break away from the scene, the hateful room, and the hateful company; to rush forth to solitude and passion, unrestraint and misery.

Strange to say, the three Gilberts were the ones with whom she was in her heart least at war. On her aunt, and Hartland, and the Stonebys—all of whom she perceived to be watchful and anxious, and beginning to interpret aright—on these she could pour the full vials of her wrath. The poor Gilberts—they were as harmless as doves—they alone did not molest her; they only were satisfied and unsuspecting, and, in consequence, to be borne; but she saw that Lady Julia was aroused, she fancied the Stonebys on the alert, and she knew that Hartland knew: they were one and all intolerable.

The dog-cart, the pony-chaise, anything would be better than that solemn, round table, surrounded by those many pairs of curious eyes, which were now turned on her, now on her lover, and now on the plates before them. It needed that she clasped her hot, trembling hands closely on her lap, that she held her breath and set her teeth tight within her closed lips, to prevent further exposure and defeat. That she could not bear.

It seemed now as if the hostess would never rise; and as, indeed, Lady Julia would have sat on till midnight to undo her niece's misdemeanor, she was now glued to her chair, thankful as she would have been—almost as thankful as any one—to quit it. Wild with vexation, the author of her own discomfiture had accordingly to endure a prolonged punishment; while Gilbert, who had been unable to help feeling hurt, and had gently enough charged her with unreasonableness in his own mind, was being comforted and soled.

Under such treatment he could not but recover.

and though he had just sufficient feeling on the point to cut short his meal, and refuse cheese and biscuits, and some young, crisp, and juicy celery, of which vegetable he was particularly fond, he was himself again by the time he had finished.

"She should not have snubbed me so before them all," he reflected; "but, poor girl, she has so much spirit, I must not be too hard upon her."

It did not occur to him to wonder why she should have been inclined to "snub."

Hartland was rummaging for cigars when the ladies at last left the room. "I have lots in the billiard-room," he said, "but it is such a way off. I brought some here. I know I put them down here"—overturning papers, and peering behind mantel-piece ornaments—"on purpose to be handy; for I expect that builder fellow has come, and we may as well go out at once."

"First say what you think of these," said Major Gilbert, producing the handsome silver cigar-case wherewith Rosamund had endowed him in the early and palmy days of their engagement. They were moving toward the door as he spoke, and he looked at it for a moment tenderly, and, as he thought, unperceived. "I have some rather good ones here," and he handed the case to each.

"I know them," said Hartland, joyfully accepting one; "if these are the same brand as the last, they are perfectly delicious."

"Do allow me to make you a present of a box, Lord Hartland. They are the same. I never smoke any other, and I shall be greatly honored if you will accept some."

"You may be quite sure I shan't *refuse* them. I say, how good of you! I shall look forward every hour till that box arrives. Thanks awfully." Then he turned away with almost a groan. All on the surface so smooth and fair, but beneath—what next?—*what next?* . . .

Poor Rosamund, whom to blame or pity mo know not, but whose state of mind did not cer render her the most agreeable companion in the at this period, did not long enjoy the relief aff by a general discovery of this fact.

For a brief half-hour she was indeed left in , while Lady Julia explained the mysteries of som kind of needlework to Emily Gilbert, and Clem piloted Henrietta through an illustrated manual during that time she could lie back in the dep her chair, speechless and weary, caring about ne but to be let alone, conscious of nothing bu luxury of being unobserved and unwatched. ually, under the influence of the quiet room, distant murmurs only soothed her ear, and fi refreshed by a cup of hot and fragrant coffee— Julia's institution, which had never been adopt King's Common, though greatly appreciated t young ones whenever they came to the Abbey,— these combined narcotics her breathings becam tler and gentler, her eyelids closed, and the hea of her troubled bosom resembled the slow swell ocean after the tumult of the storm has subsic thought was all but suspended, pain quite, sh nearly sunk into a slumber, peaceful and sweet infant's, from sheer exhaustion of mind and b when, as it seemed with a deafening and odious or, an incomprehensible, cruel uproar, she was a moment recalled to the present scene, and t entrance of Eleanour, Violet, and Amy Wate who were walking up the room.

Waterfields, now ! Waterfields at this most u unate, most miserable juncture !

No words can depict the feelings of th happy Rosamund. She had dreaded their r and wished the first meeting well over, an wound herself up to carry it off bravely ; bu they should have her thus at vantage was indeed.

She had known very well how they felt about her engagement; the letters had been exactly what she had expected. They had hoped she would "be very happy," and had been sure Major Gilbert "was very fortunate," and she had tossed the epistles scornfully aside, and had responded in set terms, which had been understood with equal distinctness by them on their part. This formality accomplished, there had been a lull, with an ever-increasing repugnance toward breaking it. To have it broken thus! To have this added to all that had gone before!

Not only to have her little comforting nap rudely interrupted at its sweetest moment, just when senses and sounds were fading away into the soft, seductive confusion of dreamland—not only to be recalled to thinking, and talking, and ceremony, and Lady Julia's drawing-room, when she would so fain have been anywhere, anywhere else in the kingdom—but to be called upon with her present enfeebled powers to encounter the friends whose opinion she feared the most in the whole world, and discuss the subject she would of all others have avoided!

If anything more had been needed to fill the cup of bitterness, the presence of Emily and Henrietta Gilbert supplied it.

This must now be their introduction to the polite, composed, critical companions of Rosamund's youth, whose society even Lady Caroline had cultivated, and whose approbation even she, in her heart, had considered worth obtaining.

At no more luckless moment could Em and Etta have been subjected to first view.

Perhaps nobody looks to advantage during the torpid, digestive hour immediately succeeding a heavy mid-day meal, especially if the room be warm, the windows shut, and the conversation languid. There is a general air of plethora about a party so situated. Eyes grow dull, cheeks pale, expressions inanimate; *while even the dress would seem to partake of the*

same reaction, and is apt to look negligent and disarranged.

Thus with our spick-and-span young ladies, who had stepped in so briskly, all tied up, curled up, and twisted up two hours before ; they were now limp and sodden ; Emily's hat had crept down over one eye, and Etta's neckcloth had contrariwise crept up ; while the smart pin which had heretofore kept it jauntily in its place had by some means or other worked itself loose, and hung forlornly over on one side.

The neat gloves, Clementina's envy, were no longer there to hide rather large, red, and ill-shapen hands ; and the unsuitability of the patent-leather boots was more than ever apparent, now that the mud had dried upon them.

No one else had suffered to the like extent : true, Lady Julia's cap had slipped slightly awry, but otherwise she looked much as usual ; Clemmy Stoneby would always be Clemmy Stoneby, and from having at no time any looks to lose, found her advantage at a moment like the present ; but the Gilberts, who were not without pretensions to beauty of a certain order and under certain conditions, were, it must be allowed, hardly dealt with, in being thus caught and held up to the light ; and the pang of mortification experienced by Rosamund in recognizing the truth of this, brought her to herself sooner than anything else could have done.

" It only needed this ! " she said to herself. " Well, after all, nothing matters much now. I have got to go through with it all ; and one thing more or less—still it *is* hard. I had meant to be so careful about when and where the Waterfields saw them. These odious frocks and hats—and they themselves—I declare Emily hardly looks handsome at all, and Henrietta positively ugly. Oh, why—why—why—" and with the " why, why, why," and a long and weary sigh, she had to rise, feign a wan smile, and drag herself to the front.

The Waterfields, on their part, considered it rather a happy idea to get over this awkward meeting when at the Abbey, and under Lady Julia's wing. They had not anticipated it over-readily themselves, but they had seen that, could it be come at haphazard, as it were, it might be shorn of half its disagreeables; and accordingly, on hearing at King's Common, where they had stopped half-way, that Miss Liscard and her guests were to be found at her aunt's, they had joyfully followed her thither. A spice of lively curiosity had been added to other feelings when the young ladies had been spontaneously informed who were Rosamund's guests, and further, that Major Gilbert's sisters had only arrived on the previous evening. They had not lifted so much as an eyelash indeed, in the presence of their informant; but no sooner had King's Common been left behind, than congratulations had passed, and steps had quickened. There had not been two opinions as to the advisability of proceeding to the Abbey; the advantages of so doing had been too obvious.

"The more the merrier, certainly," Eleanour had said. "With so many others present, of course nothing of consequence can be said; and even about poor Lady Caroline it would be difficult to find just the right thing to say, if we had Rosamund all to ourselves."

They were, we thus see, jubilant and strong; while she was weak, worn, and already spent by contest: everything was on their side, nothing on hers.

Dejected, querulous, apprehensive, and suspicious, with an aching sense of her own folly and guilt overshadowing every outlook, can it be wondered at that poor Rosamund was in no case to hold her own, far less to shield her friends? *Her* friends? Yes, in that light must Gilbert and his family now be one and all regarded. She had brought them there. She had brought them into notice at all. But for her—but oh, *she must not, durst not* think of this now.

Sick at heart, she exchanged the unmeaning kiss all round.

How gay and heartless sounded the voices of the new-comers! How fresh and insulting the bloom upon their countenances! She and hers all in shadow—they all in sunshine! Then they sat down, and she heard the lively buzz begin, and marked the quiet, inspecting glance, and felt and knew what was being thought, and told herself she did not care, and almost laughed when Etta said something more glaringly inappropriate than usual, and laughed again when Emily's scarlet top-knot lurched rakishly over, nearly brushing Violet Waterfield's cheek,—and reckless, told herself it was all very amusing, and would make an excellent scene for her old friends to jest over when they returned home, and—and—what was that?

The door opening, the gentlemen coming in, Gilbert's loud, full-toned voice dominant in the doorway, Gilbert's laugh noisily echoing up the room—

“—I—I—oh, hold me, Eleanour!” cried Rosamund, and fell fainting on the floor.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"ANY OTHER COURSE WOULD BE UNWORTHY."

"It behoves the high
For their own sake to do things worthily."

"IT is a case of nervous prostration, Lady Julia. Complete nervous exhaustion, and prostration of strength. Miss Liscard has experienced a severe shock to the system in that very sudden and—and deplorable death of her mother; and coming at such a time as it did—in connection with the other event,"—for the speaker was a faithful old *habitué* of King's Common, and well up in its affairs,—“it was altogether more than this poor young lady could bear. I have known Miss Rosamund since she was a child. Nervous—highly nervous—and excitable. It only surprised me that she did not give way before; but she has great spirit—unbounded spirit. She would confess to nothing when I questioned her more than once of late about herself. Now, Lady Julia, this is a case requiring great care—very great care, and judiciousness. You understand me? Any return to the scene of her recent distress would most certainly be detrimental. By-and-by it may be necessary to try the effects of a thorough and complete change, but for the present I must ask you to let my patient remain here."

"‘Let’ her remain!" cried Lady Julia,—“‘let’ her remain, Dr. Makin!" for her companion was the village doctor, once or twice before mentioned, and the two were together in the otherwise deserted drawing-room, *he having been sent for in hot haste an hour before*; “*why, of course my dear niece remains.*”

will not permit her to be removed by any one. On my own responsibility I should have insisted upon it; and of course now, with your authority to detain her, nothing can be said."

"Certainly—certainly you have my authority. In fact, I should consider any attempt at removal might be attended with most serious consequences. The symptoms are too grave to be trifled with."

"Quite so. Yes, I am sure they are. Just what I said myself," and Lady Julia's faint pink cheeks flushed with a sort of jubilant hilarity, and her eyes sparkled in a manner that made the worthy doctor look at her in astonishment.

"Where should the poor child be but under my roof?" proceeded she, briskly. "At whose house would she meet with greater care? Who would watch over her and nurse her as I should? Am I not now in the place of her own dead mother?"

("And a vast deal better fitted to fill it!" thought Makin.)

"Why, *of course* Rosamund is my rightful charge, and I shall give her up to no one," pursued the little woman, fierce as a bantam-hen over one of her brood; "and I am sure—yes, I am sure that she is quite ill enough to warrant my saying so."

Now this was not precisely what her learned authority had meant to be the result of his words, and he was just a trifle puzzled in consequence. Of Lady Julia's unbounded affection for her sister's family, and for this member of it in particular, he was quite aware; and yet, in consulting him on the present alarming occasion, and discussing the chances of a serious illness to follow, instead of the tearful and tender anxiety which would have been only natural, he beheld a curious satisfaction, even an exhilaration in the good lady's demeanor which was inexplicable.

Her great, her one thought seemed to be that the patient was not to be removed, her one fear lest others should differ on the point.

He thought she did not realize the gravity of the situation.

"She will certainly require very great care," he observed emphatically.

"And she shall certainly have it," replied she with vivacity.

He hardly knew how to make himself more intelligible. Lady Julia's ideas and his own were clearly not in accord, and hers not precisely the sort of care he meant: of her good-will he was secure, but of her discretion she was not at the moment giving him the most favorable of impressions.

There she stood on the tiptoe with eagerness; excitement, and apparently really pleasurable excitement, lighting up every feature, her words tripping each other up in their haste, and the lips remaining apart and ready again for immediate action, even when the stream was for a brief second checked. It was with difficulty he obtained an innings at all; and it was only by throwing all the authority he could into a profoundly solemn countenance, that he found himself in any way able to cope with the voluble spinster. "I never knew before what a tongue she had," he thought.

Could he have put down the whole to agitation—but Lady Julia was not a person to suffer from agitation; her feelings were too simple, too natural; her tears profuse,—even on hearing of her only sister's startlingly sudden end she had merely wept and wailed, and ordered her mourning with heartfelt but perfectly wholesome grief,—so that her present humor was against all precedent, and was, in fact, almost reprehensible.

"If there be not the very strictest watch maintained, and unless my instructions are carried out to the letter," he pronounced, with his best frown, "recollect, your ladyship, that I cannot answer for the consequences. Your ladyship will remember that I have *warned you.*"

"I will, indeed, Dr. Makin ; and I shall say so to every one. I shall tell them that you think very seriously indeed, of my poor niece—"

—"Well, we must take care, Lady Julia. I should hardly like to say 'very seriously indeed'; I could hardly go so far as that. I said very serious consequences might ensue—"

—"But you do think she requires the closest attendance, and the strictest guard," urged the lady coming closer and glancing round, as though what she was now saying would not bear the chance of being overheard. "I am sure you think that? I am sure you said it? Do you not? Did you not?" intent upon her object. "You may be quite, quite honest, Dr. Makin, you may indeed. Is that not your express desire? Have I not your orders for insisting that no one is to be admitted to her room but myself? No conversation—no letters—"

—"My dear madam, we must not go too far. We must tread softly, your ladyship, softly. We must wait and see. For a day or two I should certainly recommend absolute repose ; but after that, if Miss Rosamund goes on favorably, and would like to see a friend—one at a time—"

"Oh, if you once begin, there will be no end to it," interrupted her ladyship snappishly, "and I am sure you did say she ought to see no one. I assure you, and you may take my word for it, that if you wish your patient to be quiet, her only safety lies in your most positive orders that no one, no one whatever, is admitted to see her. Dr. Makin, you do not know these Gilberts—forward, pushing people—" she stopped, bit her lip, and was aware of her indiscretion.

The doctor, however, prudently showed nothing. "Naturally, naturally," he rejoined, shaking his wise head ; "new connections, eager to show attention. We can not wonder at it—but we must be careful how we permit it. We must ward them off as civilly as we can. It would certainly not do to allow them too much

encouragement, and we must run the risk of giving offense rather than fail in our duty to our patient. Perhaps it would be better taken if I were to speak myself."

—"Why, yes, that is the very thing I wish!" cried Lady Julia, joyfully restoring him to all her former favor, "the very thing, my dear Dr. Makin, that I am trying to point out to you. If you would take these—these strangers in hand, if the prohibition were to come straight from you, there would be no ill-feeling created, and the effect would, besides, be much greater; but if I were to interfere, it might be supposed that it was I who was trying to create an estrangement. So now, I see you understand the position, and how necessary, how absolutely necessary, it is for you to speak out boldly. Do not hesitate. A medical verdict, you know, is *never* disputed." And she sighed her relief.

A few minutes before, she had trembled lest he was about to desert her cause and take service with the enemy.

The "enemy." That was the light in which she now regarded Major Gilbert and his family. Among them they had brought her darling to this pass, and they should now be annihilated (at any rate for the present, while for the future also her hopes now rose) by this most excellent mouthpiece whom Providence had sent her. Neither did Makin dislike his errand.

"It is undoubtedly indispensable that I should be plain," he assented cheerfully; "and as your ladyship observes, a physician is licensed to deal with the unvarnished truth. I shall not hesitate to—"

—"Forbid their coming to the house?"

"To Miss Rosamund's room. I presume you would not wish to have me close your front door also?"

She perceived that, whatever she might wish, she could hardly carry such an injunction into effect, and once more her brow faintly clouded over. But it was *a great point gained* that she was to have the sick-room

kept sacred ; and with the thought of that dear form lying there, with the touch of those clinging arms still hovering round her neck, that wet cheek still felt on hers, that cry whose very incoherence had made all clear—that feeble, imploring cry, “ You only, you only,” ringing in her ears—with all of this so sweet, so inexpressibly sweet, to her loving heart, she was fain to be content. Her beloved was her own once more.

As soon as ever Rosamund should be sufficiently recovered, there would again be the fullest confidence between them, and their old affection would be only redoubled and intensified by all that had passed.

The Gilbert episode should be a thing of the past (Lady Julia was rapid in her conclusions); and having become equally obnoxious to both, its termination should be as equally looked upon in the light of a deliverance.

And then, after a brief delay—there need be no hurry, nothing indecent nor unseemly—but after a proper interval had elapsed, then surely, surely the dearest project of her heart might, must, could, and should come to pass.

Had poor Caroline only lived to see it !

But poor Caroline’s child should not suffer from her mother’s loss. Here was she, ready and willing to play a mother’s part ; and in the variety of emotions thus suggested, her eyes were suffused in happy moisture, almost before the worthy doctor had put his seal upon Rosamund’s bed-room door.

Rosamund had been carried up to a chamber next her aunt’s—a large, warm, bright apartment—which, with its faded blue hangings, its curious walls hung with black-framed engravings, its small round mirrors, high carved mantel-piece, roomy couches and chairs, and, above all, its broad low window-seats, from which could be seen a far-stretching view of beechen slopes and sunny upland, had ever been a favorite with her.

As a child she had always begged to be put to sleep in the huge four-post bed ; she had liked to slumber

off gazing upon those marvelous pictures, and those quaint devices on the ceiling. She had rejoiced to know that Aunt Julia was on the other side of the green baize door, the door which would alone be visible when the outer one stood open, as she would have have it done when there. The room had been her mother's, but Lady Caroline had never so much as heard of Rosamund's predilection for it. For herself, she had never slept at her father's house since the day she had had a home of her own; and it had never occurred to either her sister or her daughter to think it would be in the least degree interesting to her to learn that on the holiday occasions when Lady Julia's pet would be summoned thither, it was the great treat to both that Rosamund was safe and snug within the old blue room at nights.

Thither she had now been borne in her extremity.

"It was really almost providential the way it came into my head," explained Lady Julia afterward to Hartland, "because you know, Hartland, what my poor head is. And how I ever came to think at all, what with the shock of seeing the poor darling lying on the floor, and hardly knowing whether she were dead or alive, and all those girls crowding round, and those officious Gilberts seizing her hands—"

"My dear aunt, be just. They were rubbing and chafing them, and that, as you know, is always considered the correct thing to do when a person faints,—"

"Much good would it have done my poor Rosamund! Well, well, it was kindly meant, no doubt, and we were all beside ourselves; but if I had not cried out, 'Carry her to the blue room,' there was Major Gilbert tearing along with her in his arms straight for the butler's pantry."

"The best place to go," said Hartland, half laughing; "he knew he should find brandy there."

"The brandy could have been brought, and was brought immediately—oh, by yourself, I remember. *What we wanted was to get her things off, to get her un-*

dressed ; and so I tried to explain to him, for at first he had plumped the poor child down on the sofa here—on the sofa in this great, hot, noisy drawing-room ! As if she would ever have got better here !—As if, with him and his stupid, saucer-eyed sisters standing by, staring at her—”

—“ Now I say, Aunt Julia—now, dear auntie, this is not in the least like you,” said Hartland very kindly. “ Why should you be so bitter against those poor girls ? ”

“ Why ? Oh, Hartland ! you know why, too well—far, far too well. You have yourself spoken of it. And—and they were *dreadful*, beyond what I had even imagined. And to see them round my darling, taking possession of her—”

“ Making themselves far more useful than the Waterfields did. I doubt if Rosamund would have come to herself half so quickly if it had not been for the eldest Miss Gilbert. I own I was struck with her sense and energy. And as for Gilbert, what a fine, big, strong fellow he is ! He picked her up as if she had been a baby ! ”

“ Oh, big enough,” said Lady Julia scornfully ; “ those sort of men, with their bull-dog strength, are useful sometimes ; and as the poor child was only half-conscious, and seemed scarcely aware of what was going on, or of whom she was being held by, she could not have minded.”

“ Do you mean anything by that, ma’am ? ” said Lord Hartland, after a moment’s steady look into her face. “ Do you mean to say that you have any reason for—for supposing that Rosamund would have objected to—”

“ Now, my dear Hartland, were you not yourself the person to give me the hint ? ”

“ But you did not take it ? ”

“ Not then ; but I have done so since. I do now, for I have seen for myself.”

“ What have you seen ? ” said he, in a low voice.

"That she detests him, shrinks from him, and recoils from the very idea of having him for her husband."

"You are—sure—of that?" he said slowly.

"Absolutely—absolutely sure. Oh, could any one doubt after to-day? Even before his ill-timed appearance, her wretched, sorrowful face, her piteous eyes—my heart was aching for her; and Hartland, I felt how deeply I had been to blame for not sooner having perceived the truth. But you only said *he* was to be pitied—you only said *he* was not being done justice to—and I was so stupid—my dear, I am stupid, you know—that it never once occurred to me to think *why* I should pity him. If I had ever for a moment thought that it was because our dear Rosamund had changed her mind—but, Hartland, will it be thought—will any harm be thought of her for changing it? Will she be thought to have—oh dear, how dreadful!—to have jilted this Major Gilbert?"

"You may set your mind at rest. She will not jilt him."

"Not?"

"She says not—that nothing will induce her to do so."

"You have spoken to her, then?" said Lady Julia, almost in a whisper. She had not supposed he had done this.

"I have."

"When?"

"Yesterday evening. There is no reason why I should not tell you about it," said Hartland calmly, "especially since Rosamund will probably do so herself. I found her in the garden—in the rosery; and I not perceiving any one was there till I was close by—and she not perceiving me till I spoke to her—I could not help involuntarily playing the spy, and saw and heard—"

—"What?"

"Enough to warrant my taking her boldly to task

for her folly and injustice. That she has made and is making herself miserable by her persistence in it, is no excuse for her."

"Oh, not so harsh—not so cruel, Hartland."

"I can not help it, Aunt Julia ; I think Rosamund is behaving very, very badly."

"And you are not in the least sorry for her?"

"I did not say I was not sorry for her," said he gloomily.

"You have never expressed one syllable of kindness, of compassion."

"My compassion is for the wronged and the innocent."

"But she is so young and so innocent herself," cried poor Lady Julia, "she did not know what she was doing. She was driven into it by her mother's pride and obstinacy. Heaven forgive me that I should say such a thing!" fumbling wildly with the truth, "but it was so ; it really was so, Hartland. My poor sister was full of prejudices, and when once she had taken up a prejudice, nothing could move it. And then some of them being so unreasonable—for they were unreasonable, and I will say it—how were the poor children to discover which were, and which were not? Poor dear Caroline was quite right, quite wise to object to this Major Gilbert ; but then she had objected to so many people—so many *nice* people before—that she had naturally weakened her judgment in their opinion, Rosamund's especially. Rosamund has all her poor mother's self-will, and independence of spirit ; and she has often told me that as she grew older she meant to judge and decide for herself. Sometimes I ventured to hint to Caroline as much, but my poor sister did not take it in good part. She fancied I had no right to assume that I knew more of what her children felt, than she did. But it was a mistake—indeed, Hartland, it was a mistake—the conclusion in which those poor dears were kept. Nobody was thought good enough for them. Excellent,

worthy people, if rather homely and plain, would be sneered at in their presence. If they had been provided with other friends and companions, the evil would not have been so great. They have cousins, admirably brought up, pleasant young people, but they have hardly so much as seen them! And here, although there are several nice families about—not very near perhaps, but near enough to have been asked to dine and sleep, or spend a few days at King's Common—people such as the Weybridges, and the Caldecotts, whom Caroline herself could not have objected to,—yet they were never asked in that way. She would send them a card for her one large party in the year! Well, how was poor Rosamund to tell when her mother was right and when she was wrong? She knows that I like and approve of many whom her mother would scarcely speak to; and she knew that even those with whose birth and breeding my sister had no fault to find, were kept at a distance!" From sheer lack of breath the speaker ran down at last.

"I never heard you speak like this before," said Hartland.

"And I can not bear to speak like it now. I can not bear to say such things; but it is only justice to this poor unhappy child that somebody should stand forward on her side. Let us be on her side, Hartland, whoever is against her. Let them say what they will—"

"I tell you, Aunt Julia, there will be nothing to be said; at least, if I know Rosamund, as I think I do. I wish to heaven I could think otherwise! I may be wrong—I hardly think I am; but it is my distinct conviction now that she means to fulfill her engagement at all costs."

"Can he not see? Can he not be made to see, and free her of his own accord?"

She drew closer, and put her hand upon his arm, as her voice breathed in his ear. He shook off the hand.

"Think what you are saying—beware of what you

are advising," he replied, in a deep, stern voice. "Would you bid her dare to do so base a thing? God help the poor child, if it is this which she is being tempted to. Oh, my dear aunt, I beg, I beseech you, save her from it; never let the suggestion cross your lips a second time."

Her eyes fell before his.

"All that can be done ought to be done to put her present conduct in its true light before her," continued the speaker; "but it is not in that way, not in that way that any high-minded woman should seek to escape the chain she has forged for herself. One course only is open to Rosamund, to confess her terrible blunder, and to bear its terrible consequences. Any other is beneath her; unworthy of that noble nature."

The faltering phrase appeared to escape him unawares; he seemed for the time to have forgotten the presence of another, and to be but communing with his own spirit: and while she yet remained mute and abashed beneath the severity of his rebuke, he slowly passed out of the room.

"Dear me! I had meant no harm. I must certainly take care how I say that again," quoth Lady Julia, promptly recovering; "but it had really seemed to me the very best way in which it could have been managed."

Meantime Rosamund lay still in the faded blue chamber overhead, watching the shadows fall deeper and deeper down upon the wall in the flickering fire-light, as the stars rose, one by one, in the pale sky without.

She had no desire to stir, to speak, to move; it seemed to her that if she should never again rise from that bed of weakness all would be well: she would have found rest and peace.

With her entrance into that calm abode, with the nestling down among the softly-wooing pillows, with the departure of all save that one loved and loving face, there had fallen such a hush upon her spent and

storm-tossed spirit as she thought she should never care to break again.

Was she going to be very ill? Delightful hope. To be very ill, and have to lie there, in that quiet haven where she had found an anchorage, for long, long years to come! To have every entrance from the world without sedulously barred, guarded, barricaded? To see none, speak to none, communicate with none? Oh, what bliss!—what a heaven already!

And her aunt had sworn it should be so. Poor Lady Julia, feverish as herself with anxiety upon the point, had repeated assurance and promises over and over again. "Yes, my dear, dear child, yes; it shall be as you wish, it shall indeed. I will let no one near you—no, not even the housemaids, for old Charlotte and I will do all the nursing between us. Charlotte will do everything in the room—I know she will. You shall not see a strange face. Old Nanny may come in now and then to sit by the fire. You would not mind her. She likes to fancy she is not altogether put on one side; and you would not need to talk to her,—for, my darling, you must not talk, nor move, nor even think, if you can help it. You are safe now—safe under Aunt Julia's care; and oh, my dear one—my dear one—Rosamund, my precious, we may be happy yet!"

Rosamund had scarcely heard, but she had felt it all. Tears had flowed from very thankfulness.

But presently they started again from another source. She fell to wondering and recollecting.

What now would be thought about her by others? What would Hartland think, for one? Hitherto he had been so completely engrossed by Gilbert's wrongs that he had had no room in his mind for hers. No. Not for her wrongs, perhaps, but for her misery. Would he reflect upon it now? Would he forgive her now? If she were to grow worse and die, would he not pity her just a little?

The pillow was wet beneath her head.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A HOST ENJOYING HIMSELF.

"If she laugh, and she chat,
Play, joke, and all that,
And with smiles and good-humor she meet me,
She's like a rich dish
Of venison, or fish,
That cries from the table, 'Come eat me!'"

—ANON.

"BUT, dear me! this is very awkward, Rosamund's not coming home to dinner," quoth Rosamund's papa, when informed of what had happened. "Not coming home at all to-night, is she?"

Major Gilbert, to whom the inquiry was put, made answer in the negative; and then hastily explaining—for he was pressed for time—that he was himself obliged to be absent likewise, he made for the door, before his astonished host could collect himself for anything further.

"Dear me! this is really very awkward," proceeded Mr. Liscard, reflecting. "I wish one or other of them had been here. I—really—upon my word, what am I to do? Am I to entertain these young ladies all by myself? Am I to be obliged to talk to them during the whole of dinner? And how in the world am I to know what to talk about? I must say if there is one thing I like, it is to eat my dinner in peace. Really this is very annoying. I do hope it is only for once and away: I do hope Rosamund will not do such a thing again. If there is any chance of its happening a second time, Hartland must come over, or the Stonebys, or somebody. I can not undertake to have these Miss Gilberts here, and nobody to attend to them. They should never have been invited.

if this was to be the way. Their brother making off too, just when he could have been useful! The whole thing has been very badly managed." And the meek man, who would never have presumed to lift up his little finger on his own behalf in the days of his imperious spouse, was now quite creditably peevish, and stood upon his rights like any other middle-aged head of a house.

It will thus be seen that he had come on during his widowerhood.

He had indeed astonished everybody, and none more than himself; for those days of mourning had, to speak the truth roundly, been the most peaceful and congenial he had passed for many a long year.

He had been, as was only natural, shocked and distressed by the tragical event which had left him a widower, and it had taken full eight-and-forty hours for him to collect his ideas, and feel the new ground whereon he stood.

But that accomplished, almost simultaneously there had breathed throughout his soul a spirit of sweet resignation, and an indistinct and novel sense of importance.

Never in the course of his whole married life had he been made of consequence to anybody—he was now *the* person of the house.

His wishes, his desires were paramount as regarded all arrangements to be made, and the slightest hint that dropped from his lips was acted upon forthwith.

To him were condolences primarily offered, and letters of sympathy addressed; for, in the eye of the world, he must presumably stand out second to none in the august affliction which had overtaken the august family.

It might have been a little troublesome—for so high a position had its responsibilities—but he could not well at such a period have otherwise occupied himself. His treatise on Kant would have had to wait at *iny rate until after the funeral day*; and previous to

it he would not even, as we know, unpack the new books, although the box had actually got as far as the niche in the library sacred to such arrivals.

That being the case, he would have been sadly at a loss had the vacuum remained unfilled, so that it had seemed quite the right thing for the steward to come to him with suggestions, Lord Hartland with reminders, and Mr. Stoneby with the programme of the burial service.

He had really had little to do beyond putting as it were his seal upon each and all of these : Rosamund had written the bulk of his letters, the servants among them managed the household business, and Lady Julia had proved an authority on the outlay expected in the way of mourning. As one and all had matured their own ideas before submitting them for his sanction, it could not have been called severe mental labor which the demands occasioned, and they had brought with them a gentle variety of interest which at such a juncture had been rather welcome than otherwise. His own tailor had, moreover, made him the most comfortable and well-fitting suit he had had for a long time ; and when he had discovered this, in addition to the other amenities of his condition—and when he had slipped “poor Caroline’s” wedding-ring upon his little finger, and found that it also fitted, and would require no troublesome alteration, poor Catherine herself would have opened her eyes could she have beheld the swiftness with which her bereaved one was accommodating himself to his loss.

It may indeed have been questioned whether matters would have been quite so smooth, had Rosamund not been taken up with her own affairs at this time.

We are inclined to think that had there been no Major Gilbert, no recent betrothal and new-found remorse mingling with the natural shock of distress, a push for the leading rein would have been made from that quarter. But Rosamund had been bewildered.

amazed, and immersed in self-consciousness, and the one thing clear to her at the moment had been the duty which she owed her single remaining parent. Moreover, it had been a relief to turn to his wants and needs, and fancy them greater than they were, and exaggerate his grief, and presume that he was a sufferer. She had chosen to consider that he and she were in unison, and that no deference nor attention was too great to be shown to one so afflicted. It had been her best way of silencing Gilbert, and making him uncomfortable—that was the truth; but naturally of this her father could not be aware, and, as a result, it had been perhaps with her more than with any one else that he had tasted the sweets of consequence.

That she should now desert him was therefore what he had little expected; and he had by this time become so used to his advance in public estimation all round, that he was quite equal to being aggrieved thereby.

Here were Major Gilbert's sisters, nice young people, likely to make the house more cheerful, give him a little music of an evening, and require nothing of him beyond an arm for the elder in to dinner—here they were all at once to be thrown on his hands entirely! He had had no sort of objection to their coming; he had been quite pleased to have them, and they had been easy and sociable during the preceding evening, and had made altogether a favorable impression,—but that was not to say he was ready to have them for his guests, when not a single other member of the family was present.

It was downright inconsiderate of Rosamund; and as for Gilbert, he could as well have stayed as not,—and in this humor he descended to the drawing-room.

Immediate relief, however, awaited him there.

In the easiest lounging-chair by the fire, arrayed in her new, black evening frock, her hair elaborately drawn up and arranged—(she had prevailed on her maid to do it, fearless of exposure, now that her eldest

sister was disposed of, and Dolly tongue-tied by connivance)—there sat Miss Catherine Liscard, the very picture of cool, prim composure.

"I knew that you could not do without me to-night, papa"; on his entrance he was thus accosted. "I made haste, so as to be down in time to help you with the visitors. They will be ready directly. But they were rather late in going to their rooms."

"Are you going to dine?" inquired her father, immensely relieved. "By the way, you did dine yesterday, did you not?" Until now the recollection of this had escaped him.

"Yes, papa. And I think I had better dine as long as the Miss Gilberts are here, for it would be so uncomfortable for you to have them all by yourself," rejoined the astute miss, with commendable grasp of the situation. "You could not possibly be left without *some one*, and as we do not know how long poor Rosamund may be away—"

—"Dear me! what do you mean, child? Not know how long Rosamund may be away!"

"Or even that she will be able to sit up to dinner when she does come back," proceeded Catherine deliberately; "and if that is to be the way"—and she glanced at him with a glance which meant—"if that is to be the way, here am I, equal to anything, and perfectly competent to fill any one's place."

Apparently, however, Mr. Liscard did not see it. "Who told you this?" he demanded, discomfited anew. "Who said that Rosamund would not be able to come home to-morrow? She is merely passing the night at her aunt's, as she has often done before."

"Aunt Julia told Emily that she did not at all expect that Rosamund would be able to return to-morrow," began Catherine; "Emily will tell you herself what Aunt Julia said," as Miss Gilbert entered; "here she comes, papa, and you can ask her."

"I am exceedingly sorry that this should have happened on the very first day of your visit, Miss Gil-

bert," said her host, who was not deficient in old-fashioned politeness ; "I don't know what my daughter has been about, I am sure. They tell me she has been overdoing herself ; but she was never a delicate girl, and I don't think it can be that. She looked as well and bright as anybody yesterday evening. I remarked to myself that I had not seen her so like her old self for many weeks. Your and your sister's coming had seemed to do her good directly," he added, gallantly.

"I have no doubt it will soon pass off," replied Emily Gilbert, "and it was such a good thing that it happened in the house, and not out of doors. If Rosamund had been sitting up in Frederick's dog-cart, for instance, she might have had a terrible fall. And he had arranged for her to drive with him—only think ! But we were all sitting quietly in the drawing-room, and so she was attended to directly, and was better, and trying to get a little sleep, before we left."

"And Aunt Julia had got Dr. Makin," added Catherine, who had already mastered all details.

"I am only sorry it should have happened to spoil your day," reiterated Mr. Liscard, who, as we know, was not an anxious parent. "Upon my word, it is most unfortunate. I know my daughter had been arranging a number of little expeditions ; she was most anxious to make your stay pleasant."

"Oh, we shall be sure to find it pleasant, Mr. Liscard."

"And your brother to be obliged to run off too !" continued he, "when he dines with us almost every evening ! I never, or at least hardly ever, knew him unable to remain before—certainly never when he was wanted—I mean especially wanted. However, we will do our best. Here is Catherine says she is to sit up for once—"

Catherine's face fell. "For once," indeed ! And she had thought he had so entirely accepted her as his ally and assistant ! For this—for a series of *sittings up*—she had planned and hoped, and had had

her hair dressed like Rosamund's, and made herself look as old as ever a girl of sixteen could—and then to hear herself spoken of as though she were six !

In an agony now as to her right to head the table—that *Ultima Thule* of her imagination—she hastily interposed, "I am to take my sister's place for to-night, papa says. Papa must have some one to take her place," she added confidentially to Emily ; "it would look so odd if no one sat at the other end of the table."

"I dare say ! Put it on 'papa,'" cried Mr. Liscard, feeling that his way was being smoothed, and his spirits rising in consequence. "So you have left one of your number behind, I hear," to Henrietta, who now entered. "I was just telling your sister that I consider it very bad manners on Rosamund's part to play you such a trick. But if you do not mind—oh, there is dinner," and he gave her his arm unsuspectingly, and even when the sisters looked at each other, visibly betraying his mistake, he did not alter it.

"What ! Have I made a mistake ?" he said ; "but, upon my word, I do not think it was my fault. Miss Gilbert, I beg your pardon, and I shall place you on my right hand, so it will be all straight in the end, I think. We are a very small party to-night certainly. Soho, Catherine ! so you have stuck yourself up there, have you ?" (Poor Catherine !) "You little impertinence," added he laughing, "I wonder what Rosamund would say if she saw you ! Well, now, what soup is this ?"

It chanced to be oyster soup, and if there was one soup he loved above all others, that soup was before him. His satisfaction and cheerfulness increased with every mouthful. His young guests wondered how they had ever feared him, ever dreaded the meal ; and telegraphed to each other the termination of their doubts and fears. Even Rosamund's and Frederick's absence was atoned for by the new tone adopted by their host, and by the celerity with which he had thus

come to the front ; and, encouraged to be easy, their native assurance reasserted itself, and their tongues ran fast.

" I do think they are rather free," internally commented demure Miss Catherine, who also had undergone a change since her promotion, and from being an anxious and insecure adherent fawning on the strangers, had become in her own eyes a sort of queen-regent for the time being, once she found herself in the coveted throne-chair to which Rosamund had succeeded on her mother's death. " They are actually chaffing papa, and making fun with him ! " cried she to herself in virtuous horror.

What was worse, papa was chaffing back, and laughing heartily.

The poor man was indeed little accustomed to being amused at his own dinner-table. If his wife had been in good humor, she had prated of her own concerns, and had not cared a jot whether or no any one listened ; if not, she had partaken of her food in morose silence. But in neither mood had any one else dreamed of leading the conversation ; and although at the beginning of Rosamund's butterfly reign there had been some faint signs of better things, and her prattle had been tolerated, and had even won an occasional smile, the rift in the clouds had been of brief duration, and with the rise of Gilbert had come the fall of his champion.

It was therefore with a new sensation that the widower, long accustomed to sipping his sherry, and partaking of his soup, his fish, his mutton, and currant-jelly, down to the morsel of cheese his digestion permitted, in almost unbroken silence and with undivided attention, now found himself partaking of a second slice in the middle of a jest, and quite inclined for a newly warmed plate and some fresh vegetables, since Emily Gilbert was so fond of sea-kale.

He was convinced it did him good to have his appetite thus provoked.

Surely it was a mistake to eat as a duty, and lack of conversation and mirth was apt to make the meal degenerate into a mere bolting of the food. His poor wife had never understood this, and who could say how much harm her taciturnity might not have done her? But women rarely had sense in such matters. And with these reflections he racked his memory anew for fresh quotations and pleasing anecdotes.

Miss Catherine's disapproving visage at the top of the table for some time escaped his notice, and when it could no longer do so, it merely inspired him with a sense of amusement. What did the silly thing mean, that she should presume to look like that at him? And why should she or any one suppose that he could not be agreeable and entertaining, and produce some of his rich stores of learning for the benefit of an appreciative audience, as well as any other man? Clever men, brain-working men, such as himself, were the very people to be most delightful and instructive when they gave themselves up to being so. "That foolish girl little knows," thought he.

As for the ladies on either side of him, he did not know when he had met with such nice, merry, unaffected lasses.

How much they had to say, and how nicely they said it! Not a bit shy. Evidently not at all bored. Before he was well done with the one, he would be attacked by the other; and whatever he said was applauded and agreed to by both. It came in the end to this, that he found himself half-way through a helping of rich steam-pudding—which he would as soon have flown as partaken of two months before—and vastly enjoying the sauce, without having once inquired into its ingredients!

He really did not know himself. But this he did know, that after partaking of such a reckless repast as he had never before in his life ventured upon, he found himself as light and comfortable as heart of man could desire. He flicked his napkin in Cath-

erine's surly face as she filed past after the others, for whom he was gallantly holding open the door; he almost made a grimace at her behind her back. "Ridiculous puss! if she thinks to sit there and look sour at her own father, she is mistaken," cried he to himself; "that's the nuisance of daughters. But I shall certainly not put up with any nonsense from *her*. Back she shall hop, skip, and jump to Miss Penrose to-morrow, if she does not behave herself better—ay, even if Rosamund has to be still away. What odds? I can get on without either of them,"—and so openly did he show this, and so effectual were the few words presently whispered in the ear of the malcontent, that there was a swift curtailment of the young lady's long-drawn face, and a rearrangement of her ideas.

"Of course, if poor papa makes a point of it, poor papa ought certainly to be the first consideration," Propriety counseled; "and anything would be better than being stopped dining to-morrow," Truth slipped out, next.

There was also breakfast to be thought about. The school-room breakfast at King's Common was over a full hour before the great gong sounded for the more elaborate repast of the elders, and the mysteries of the latter had never once been unclosed to Catherine's yearning vision. Here was her opportunity. By playing her cards well, she need hardly doubt but that permission would be granted for that most coveted post of all—the seat behind the massive silver tea and coffee pots; whereas, on the contrary, if she should receive another "What are you thinking about? You are no good at all. We might as well be without you, unless you exert yourself to be more agreeable,"—it would be the deathblow of all her hopes.

Without a parent's express permission she durst not absent herself from the eight o'clock breakfast and appear at the other. Dinner had been another matter. At that hour the sway of Miss Penrose had of *late been relaxed*, indeed altogether suspended, and

once downstairs, her pupils had considered themselves escaped from her jurisdiction. But Miss Penrose was not a person to be braved with impunity during the time of her lawful authority ; and the recollection of this speedily put an end to all Catherine's elegant scruples, and made her on principle as vivacious as anybody.

Such being the case she could, ere the evening closed, put forth the morrow's claim, and, indulgence being granted, her cup was full.

But though this was all very well for the nonce, it was an unnatural state of things, and one which could not go on, and two questions were agitating the breasts of all ere the next day ended : the first being naturally as to whether Rosamund were or were not ill enough to be long detained from her home ; the second, regarding the Miss Gilberts and their visit.

They had come avowedly to make friends with their future connections, their brother's affianced wife in particular ; could it be necessary for them under such circumstances to feel *de trop* ? On the other hand, was it in accordance with etiquette that they should remain at King's Common without a hostess, and throughout the day left to their own devices ?

To decamp in hot haste because Rosamund was suffering from a feverish attack seemed, however, somewhat unreasonable.

"Good Lord !" cried Gilbert, "what are you thinking of ?"

"But then," responded Miss Emily, "we don't quite know what to do with ourselves, brother."

"Do with yourselves ? How ? I should have thought that you might have found plenty to do. Go about and see the place ; go over to the Abbey—"

"It is not that, Frederick. Of course there is plenty to be done ; but it does feel so odd, and somehow as if we had no right to be doing it. We don't feel as if we had any business anywhere."

"And we have been alone ever since breakfast,"

joined in Henrietta ; "for although Catherine was with us then, she said she had to go off directly afterward, and we have not seen her again. And we did think of going over to call on Lady Julia, but we did not quite like—"

"Not like ! Not like to go over to Julia ! What nonsense ! Nobody minds Julia. And I had counted on your having been at the Abbey, so I came here first. Why, bless my soul ! I thought you would be sure to go. I'll answer for it your places were laid for luncheon there. I made sure you would have asked after Rosamund the first thing."

"So we did—at least Mr. Liscard did. A groom was sent over this morning."

"Well ?"

"She had passed a restless night, but was no worse. However, she was to be kept perfectly quiet, and Lady Julia would let us know how she was, later on. Nothing was said about our going over there."

"Hum ! Oh, well, perhaps it was as well you didn't go, then. But I shall go. I shall ride round presently. I did not bring the dog-cart to-day, as none of you would go in it yesterday."

"Oh, Frederick !"

"You would not. You preferred that old arm-chair of a chaise."

"Frederick, you know why ; it was because we had been promised to go round by the mill-stream and see the place where—you know"—and the affectionate sisters each looked the rest.

"Oh, that was it, was it ? And you could not wait ? Well, now about your stopping on. Of course you must stop on, now that you have come. It would never do to sneak back the way you came, before you were well out of sight. I don't want it all over the place at home that Rosamund is delicate either—mind that, both of you. We must manage somehow," ruminating. "You say you get on well with the old gentleman ?"

"Oh dear, yes ; as well as possible. He is so kind, and really quite lively and talkative now. He is going to show us all his books and things. But you know, Frederick, he only appears at meal-times, and to-day he has not even done that at luncheon. He explained that this was the day of some meeting at Longminster, and it was to be his first appearance at it."

"I know. It is always on a Wednesday."

"So we two had to sit up in state in that great, huge dining-room," said Etta, her blue eyes growing round at the remembrance. "Think of Em and me seated there, being waited on by those three tremendously fine men-servants, and solemnly going through all the courses ! Brother, it was *dreadful*," and her voice sank to a whisper.

Frederick laughed superior. "My dear children, you would soon get used to it. Rosamund sits up all alone, I believe, and would not care a hang if there were thirty to wait on her."

"Does she ? But no ; I should never get used to it," said Etta. Em was silent, for she was beginning to think that for her part she could.

"I suppose if you had Catherine you would be all right ?" inquired their brother, presently.

"Oh dear, yes ; her, or any one. It is the being just our two selves, with no one else at all—not one single member of the family—"

"Even a dog or a cat would be an addition," said Frederick ; "is that it ?"

"So that we need not rack our brains for something to converse solemnly about. You can not think, Frederick, how terrible it is to have regularly to *converse* with each other, when we dare not say a single thing we want to say."

"It does sound rather bad. Well, the only thing for it that I see," said he, "is for me to go to old Penrose—old Penrose will do anything for me—and beg her to give Catherine holidays in advance of all the others."

Christmas holidays must be on before long, don't think she could refuse. I don't suppose she would mind," he added, more doubtfully ; was learning not to take Rosamund's acquiescence for granted even in very simple matters. " It seems the only thing to be done," he concluded. " Well, we'll go for a stroll now, and I'll tackle the mess afterward."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNCERTAINTY.

"Uncertainty !

Fell demon of our fears ! The human soul
That can support despair, supports not thee.

—MALLET.

ON the abrupt termination of the luncheon-party at the Abbey, the three Miss Waterfields had walked off with Mr. Stoneby and his sister, Emily and Henrietta Gilbert having been disposed of in the pony-carriage, and their brother having flown for medical aid. He had constituted himself Lady Julia's messenger, since no one else, he was sure, would go so fast, or get to the village so soon ; and, all anxiety and activity, had been off ere she could say " Yes " or " No."

The absence of the entire Gilbert family was far from unwelcome to the walkers. The Waterfields were dying to know what the Stonebys thought, while the Stonebys were equally on the tenterhooks to learn the impressions received by the Waterfields. The latter had seen nothing of Major Gilbert as an engaged man, the former scarcely anything of him in any other capacity. His sisters were new to all alike.

In consequence the four females were thirsting to discuss the matter in all its bearings ; while even Jack, though but little was to be looked for from him in the way of contribution, was nothing loath to hear what others had to tell.

" I had forgotten that you knew anything of Major Gilbert," began Clementina, bravely taking the first plunge ; " it took me by surprise to hear him say ' Miss Violet ' so glibly."

"That is one of Major Gilbert's little ways," said Violet dryly. "He is very particular about giving each one of us our Christian name, and never misses an opportunity. You saw he had but half a minute for his 'Miss Violet,' and it would have been 'Miss Eleanour' the next, but that his eye fell on Rosamund fainting in Eleanour's arms."

"It must have been very alarming for you, Eleanour," said Clemmy; "but I own I, for my part, was not surprised. Rosamund has been so strange for some time, so odd and irritable and—" she just remembered to pause before another adjective slipped out. She did not wish the suggestion of unhappiness to come from her.

"She felt her mother's death exceedingly," observed the rector, coming to the rescue.

"It must certainly have been a great shock," added Miss Waterfield. But they all knew it was not Lady Caroline they were thinking about.

"I like Major Gilbert," said Clementina abruptly. Even Jack started. He had been hastily running over in his mind something neat and vague which should sound to Gilbert's credit, and yet which should not compromise his own conscience, but the four plain words of his little truthful sister somewhat took him aback; and, unable to endorse them himself, he listened breathlessly for some one of the other three to make the almost necessary response.

But there was a long, awkward silence before at length Eleanour Waterfield began. "Perhaps I ought not to say it, and I am sure I would not be unkind to Rosamund for the world, for you know what very old friends of the Liscards we are; and, indeed, it is just because we think so much of them all, that we do feel Major Gilbert is fortunate beyond his deserts. He may be very well as an acquaintance—he is certainly good-looking, and, I suppose, clever; but we—we can not quite reconcile ourselves to the idea of him as *Rosamund's husband*."

7

"He will make a very good husband," said Clemmy bluntly.

"Certainly—but not for her. Oh, I dare say he is really a worthy man"—(no one could help laughing)—"pshaw! what is the use of talking?" cried Miss Waterfield; "we all know what I mean. And those sisters! My dear Clementina, you saw the sisters."

"His sisters are not *him*."

"They are a part of him. No man can so separate himself from his belongings as not in a measure to rise and fall with them. Major Gilbert's family must presently become Rosamund's also; and how will Rosamund—Rosamund, with her proud, quick spirit, and all that unsparing judgment which made Lady Caroline so much feared, and which would make Rosamund equally so but that she has a dear, warm heart underneath it all—but still, I say, Clementina, how will she ever endure those dreadful girls?"

"She—I don't know, upon my word," cried Clemmy, suddenly bursting into ringing laughter. "That, Eleanour, I really, really do not know. Oh, I can not help it, I can not help it! Oh, I am very cruel, I ought not to laugh; but it was when you said that, Eleanour, that Rosamund's face rose up before me—Rosamund's face as it was turned now on one sister, now on the other, just as you walked up the room. It was almost grotesque, the expression of calm despair with which she regarded them. I do not think they annoyed her. The case was too desperate. No; we must give up the sisters. As to the brother—" but here the tongues of all were let loose; and as our readers may form a tolerable guess as to what next passed, we need not trouble them with a detailed account.

Mr. Stoneby alone endeavored from time to time to check the current, and at last his final words did receive some attention. "There is one thing," he said very gravely, "before we part let us all agree to remember; we are Rosamund Liscard's friends, and

whatever we may think or say among ourselves regarding her engagement, we must one and all feel bound to—”

“Oh, to hold our tongues about it to other people, of course,” said Clementina briskly.

“Never to mention—never to allow it to be gathered from us that we entertain any doubts of her future happiness. She has made her choice—God grant it prove a happy one!” he broke off abruptly, and all felt they were on new ground.

“I am sure you are right, Mr. Stoneby,” said Eleanor Waterfield, very respectfully, “and we shall all observe what you say. Good-by,” and as she shook hands she did not look into Jack’s face, nor seem to have observed anything in his tone, but to herself she commented, “Yes; I was right. I always thought so. Poor Mr. Stoneby. And he would have been a great deal better than Major Gilbert, at all events.”

“And you say the sisters were actually worse than he!” cried Mrs. Waterfield, who was not of course to be reckoned among the excluded public, from whom the real sentiments of the chosen few were to be veiled. “But I do not know why we should be surprised at that. The eldest son of people of that sort is certain to have had advantages over the rest, and our first impression of Major Gilbert was not altogether unfavorable. I can quite believe he is the best of his set. Probably the only difference, the only real difference, we should now find between him and his sisters would be, that with the one the gloss has worn off, and with the others it never was on.”

“Besides, he is handsomer than they,” said Eleanor.

“And he is a man,” added Violet.

“Very true,” observed their mother sententiously.

“As Violet says, he is a man, and what is bad in a man is worse in a woman. Major Gilbert’s manners—”

—“Think of them intensified!” cried Eleanor.

“Think of Major Gilbert’s voice trebled! Think of Major Gilbert’s self vulgarized!”

There was a general cry of "Impossible!" and she was felt to have been quite smart.

"You should have seen them pressing round poor Rosamund, tearing off her jacket and necktie, unbuttoning her collar, and the one calling to the other to take off her boots and rub her feet"—said Eleanour, in a tone of disgust, for she had taken Lady Julia's and not Hartland's view of the assistance rendered—"it was altogether such a scene! Sorry as I felt for Rosamund, I never was more thankful than when it was over. And how she would have disliked it herself, poor child!"

"I shall have to call upon them, however," concluded Mrs. Waterfield, who would not have been human if her curiosity had not been somewhat aroused by all this. "I must not neglect any of the customary civilities, more especially as Rosamund, if she is already ashamed of her new-connections, will be quick to look out for them"; and accordingly she ordered her carriage and set forth for King's Common on the following day.

"Miss Liscard is not going to return to-day?" she exclaimed, in some surprise, when informed of this. "Is it anything really serious then, Badeley?" for the butler was an old friend, and had himself advanced to the carriage-window. "Not scarlatina, nor anything of that nature, is it?"

"I believe not, ma'am. I have not heard anything of the kind."

"A nervous attack, I was told," proceeded Mrs. Waterfield. "I had certainly thought she would have returned by this time," and she mused doubtfully. How about going in? She had not asked as yet for any one else. Should she do so?

"Major Gilbert and the young ladies are walking in the garden, ma'am," said the old man, presently, and by the remark committing her to nothing. If she did not care to have the major and the young ladies summoned in, well and good, she had merely

to hand him her card, and no one would be the wiser ; if, on the contrary, it was her desire to alight, he had given her the opportunity of doing so.

"I suppose we had better?" the lady turned to her daughter. "We will come in, then, Badeley," for in Eleanour's countenance there was a prompt assent, and the two entered.

If ever a presence-chamber plainly showed a change of dynasty, it was that into which the visitors were now ushered. Not only was there no longer the formal figure at the far end, but the davenport itself had been wheeled aside ; a disused sofa had emanated from some hidden corner, and now claimed a prominent position in front of the hearth-rug ; chairs and tables, instead of being arranged precisely, as of yore, were placed hither and thither ; books that had been neatly laid one on the top of the other, bore signs of recent inspection and disturbance ; while work baskets and boxes, whose contents protruded, seemed to be everywhere ; footstools, apparently freshly-used, stréwed the hearth ; a couple of railway novels lay open, face downwards, among the sofa-cushions ; and the piano was littered with music.

The whole, in short, had an air of being *en déshabille* ; and although it could not be denied that something had been gained in the way of comfort, and there was a habitable appearance about the apartment which had previously been lacking, yet in Mrs. Waterfield's eyes the contrast was so vivid as to be scarcely seemly, and further, to be strangely wanting in reverence to the memory of its late possessor.

She recollected, moreover, that to the Gilberts alone the present cosy disorder must be due. Rosamund might indeed have altered the substantial pieces of furniture ; but Rosamund was not now here to drop work and books about.

There was nothing of the daughter of the house visible anywhere, and, as an old family friend, Mrs.

Waterfield experienced a sensation of having to lower the King's Common standard yet another step.

People of the Gilbert order rumpling those time-honored chintzes, putting their feet upon those stately stools, piling the cushions together at one end of the sofa! The novels, too, coarse and common-looking, tossed down just where the reader had lain! She felt that the half had not been told her.

Poor Em and Etta had indeed yawned through a long morning, and half the long afternoon besides, with no other help than that of those novels, and that fancy work—and the latter having been expressly intended to be done in company, they had felt it to be waste of their fine materials to progress much in it. They had tried the piano and Rosamund's music; examined everything in and about the room; wished a hundred times that it would stop raining, and, as it did not, had been obliged to fall back again upon their books, their footstools, and their sofa-cushions. By luncheon-time they had become acclimated to the drawing-room; and although it had been rearranged during their absence, they had somehow managed to effect again the full disorder of the morning before three o'clock, when their brother had appeared, as we have seen in the last chapter. Overjoyed, they had then flown out with him, as the sky had by this time cleared; and had left the room with the windows shut and the fire low, just as it was.

"Good gracious! we left that room in a pretty state," cried Emily, now. "We never dreamed of any one's coming to call in this country place. And Rosamund away too. It is the mother of those girls who came in at the Abbey yesterday, I suppose."

"And a precious lynx-eyed mother too," added Frederick. "So if you haven't done the right thing, you'll soon know it. I have a great mind not to go in. I don't see why I should. She will have to be civil now she finds I am booked here, and all's settled; but I know better than to believe she is really over-

well pleased. If I had taken up with one of her daughters—”

“Surely, Frederick, you will come in ; you will not allow Em and me to go in all by ourselves,” implored the much-alarmed Etta. “We *can't* go in by ourselves, can we, Em ? We have never seen her, and—”

—“She won't eat you.”

But he could not resist their entreaties, nor his own inclinations.

In his heart he was by no means ill-inclined to play the host on the occasion—he at home, and the Waterfields as guests, in the King's Common great reception saloon.

He had never, he knew, advanced to anything like intimacy with the Waterfields ; it had nettled him more than once in former days to find they had been entertaining when he had received no invitation ; and he and Rosamund had had their confidences on the subject—both of one mind—both triumphing that fate had spited all endeavors to separate them from each other.

“Well, well, I'll come along with you,” he now gave in with good grace. “I'll come along and keep the good folks in order. I wonder how many of them there be ? A whole bevy. I'll warrant 'em. Waterfields—unlimited order—eh, Em ? eh, Etta ?” and happy in his jest, he was reasonably disappointed at finding only the eldest daughter had accompanied her mother on the occasion.

If Rosamund had supposed that nothing could exceed the disadvantage at which her future sisters-in-law had been seen the day before, she was mistaken. True, they were not now arrayed in gaudy “bests,” fresh from a suburban dressmaker, nor were they overheated and disordered by mid-day feasting ; but they were louder, bolder, more aggressive, apologetic, and consequential than they had had any opportunity of being in Lady Julia's drawing-room.

Frederick had bidden them pluck up spirit, and be

afraid of nobody ; and, by way of further reassurance, he had entered the room first and flourished a welcome.

"How are you, Mrs. Waterfield? Glad to see you again. It is ages since we met. What a lot has happened since then, has it not? Where will you sit? Away from the fire? Bless me, what a shocking bad fire! The girls have nearly let it out. It's what they are always doing at home. Emily, this is Mrs. Waterfield. Mrs. Waterfield, Miss Gilbert. Henrietta, Mrs. Waterfield. I say, Etta, what a mess you have left this room in! Mrs. Waterfield will tell tales of you to Rosamund. You heard about poor Rosamund?" turning to her; "oh yes, by the way, some of you were there at the time."

It was now "Poor Rosamund!" all at once, and from all three.

"I never thought to hear that poor child's name so taken in vain!" cried Mrs. Waterfield afterwards. "Really, I had hardly the patience to sit still and listen to 'Rosamund! Rosamund! Rosamund!' There was no stopping it, no turning it aside. And when I think of Lady Caroline, the proudest woman in the county—" and she broke off with almost a groan; she had not loved Lady Caroline, but she had never wished her anything so bad as this.

"I am going to ride over to the Abbey presently," quoth Gilbert, after a time. "I came here first, knowing the girls would have the latest news, if I did not find Rosamund herself returned; so when I found they had not set a foot outside, to-day, I just stopped to take them out for a bit. It is dull for them," he added, kindly.

"It is a great pity," murmured Mrs. Waterfield, longing to add, "they had better go home."

"Yes, it is, an awful pity," assented he; "spoils everything. My sisters had come on purpose to cheer her up, for I was sure she was out of sorts, and she had been uncommonly pleased with the idea; and I

thought we should soon have seen her quite perked up. She was as bright as a humming-bird the night you arrived ; wasn't she, girls ?”

“ Oh dear, yes, in such spirits !” replied Emily ; “ but still we thought, Etta and I fancied, that she was perhaps, if anything, in *too* great spirits—you know what I mean, Frederick ; she was up one moment and down the next. And yesterday morning, she hardly spoke a word. Lady Julia asked if she were tired, directly we arrived there, and Rosamund owned she was ; and—”

“ I only know that I never saw her merrier than she was the evening before,” said Gilbert, not above half satisfied with this ; “ but, of course, that bears out what I say,” his brow clearing. “ She has been overdone—the whole thing has been more than she can stand ; she ought to get away from this place. And I hope we shall manage that before very long,” with a significant smile. “ Under the circumstances, I think we need not stand too much on the proprieties, eh, Mrs. Waterfield ?”

She bowed a cold assent.

“ Meantime the point is, how long is this illness to last ?” proceeded he. “ Makin is a dull ass, to my mind, and is making by far too much of it. I shall see what Rosamund says of herself. The poor girl should surely have a voice in the matter ; and she is not the one to—”

The door opened as he spoke, and, to the surprise of all, Lord Hartland walked quietly in—as though merely entering from another room.

“ Ha ! it's you ?” cried Gilbert, starting up and intercepting his hand ere he could reach any one else. “ Well, what news ? How is she ? Here is Mrs. Waterfield come to inquire ; and we were talking about her at this moment. Is she up ? Will she see me, if I go over by-and-by ?”

This was what Hartland had been sent to prevent.

“ *Not to-day*,” he replied, as soon as he had made

his greetings. "Lady Julia bade me say, in case I should find you here, that she feared no visitors could be admitted to-day. Rosamund was going to sleep, and was not to be disturbed."

"But I need not go yet; I can wait a bit."

"Medical orders, you know, Gilbert," said Hartland, who had learned his lesson.

"Oh, medical orders be hanged!" rejoined Gilbert, evidently disconcerted. "I say—"

"I am so sorry," murmured Mrs. Waterfield, her very soft voice seeming to rebuke his strident tones. "I am so grieved that such care should be needed."

Lord Hartland was silent.

"Is there anything we can do for her?" inquired the practical Miss Gilbert. "Does she want us to send her over anything?"

"Would she like books, or work?" chimed in Henrietta.

"I was not told to ask for anything—thanks," said the messenger gravely. "I believe Rosamund's maid brought over all necessaries last night."

"Please give her our love, and say how very, very sorry we are," quoth Em.

"And tell her that Catherine is such a good hostess," added Etta.

"And that Mr. Liscard would have the Irish song again last night."

"And that the bullfinch took his sugar from my hand this morning."

There was no chance for Rosamund's old friends to get in a word or to express a sentiment, all the interest and anxiety being thus already appropriated.

"I fear the messages will have to wait," responded Hartland somewhat dryly; "I shall not see the invalid."

"No, I thought not. So I shall not trouble you, Lord Hartland," and Mrs. Waterfield rose to depart. She felt as if she would defile herself by entering into the lists with such competitors; and as Gilbert had

withdrawn from her side, and with his sisters was now bestowing his whole attention on the Abbey delegate, nothing remained for her, if she would support her own dignity, but to go, and to go forthwith.

"And a jolly good riddance," cried the major, on his return from seeing her to her carriage; "she was no sweeter than usual to-day, that worthy lady. Now Hartland, as I am not to go to the Abbey, you have got to stop on here. We can't leave Mr. Liscard again at the mercy of these girls as he was last night. You should hear what an account they have to give of him. By Jove! it will make you stare. They badgered the poor old fellow so, that he was obliged to be festive in self-defense. They would not let him alone. You and I must really be here to protect him to-night."

"I—well—oh yes, I can stop," said Hartland, after a moment's consideration. "I'll just walk back and let Lady Julia know—"

"Walk back! Walk a couple of miles—"

—"Only a mile by the short cut."

"A mile's a mile when there is no reason for it. I can walk as far as anybody, but, by George! why should you do it when there's no object? Surely there are grooms and stable-boys enough about the place? We'll soon see if one of them can't go," and he rang the bell loudly.

Lord Hartland bit his lip.

He had never been quite played the host to in that room by Gilbert before.

He had seen him at home and at his ease there; but in the presence of his betrothed some sort of appeal to her had usually been necessary. Rosamund's absence had taught her cousin this new experience. He could not like it. He could not but be glad she had not seen it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GOOD FUN AT KING'S COMMON.

"Then Reason grew jealous of Folly's gay cap,
Had he that on, be sure Beauty's heart he'd entrap.

'There it is,'

Quoth Folly, 'old quiz!'

(Folly was always good-natured, 'tis said.)

'Under the sun

There's no such fun

As Reason with my cap and bells on his head.'"

—MOORE.

THE order once given, however, Hartland was disposed to take rather kindly than otherwise to the prospect before him.

His own company had become grievous to him by this time, and that of Lady Julia afforded but slight variation. He was dull and sad. The great interest of his life at this juncture lay between the two houses of the Abbey and King's Common, and of this interest he could not speak, and would fain not think, so that distraction almost of any nature was welcome.

The Gilberts might not be to his taste, but he had been about the world enough to take people as he found them, and pass a pleasant evening in almost any company. The rosy, good-humored damsels who appalled Mrs. Waterfield, and for whom indeed none of the women of his set could find a good word, appeared by no means so bad to him, and their open, unsuspecting chatter was a positive relief to his overcharged spirit. With them there need be no anxiety, no doubts, no effort. Of late in his cousin's presence there had grown to be one continuous strain of expectation and apprehension—while out of it, all had been the fever.

ish, fretting impatience of a moth to return to its candle. To be by, to watch, to burn with indignation, and to be daily and hourly more convinced of the truth of his conclusions,—that had been the consuming interest of the past few weeks; and debarred from it as he now was all at once, with Rosamund unapproachable, and nothing more to be seen or learned, divined or discovered—with the whole affair, in short, at a dead lock—he experienced a sudden desire to throw off his burden, and breathe another atmosphere.

"Come, we'll have a jolly evening!" cried Gilbert, perceiving something of this. "We'll have a good time. What do you say to billiards before dinner? The girls will come and look on. It is by far the best time of day for billiards, to my mind, especially on these dark days when one has to come indoors so soon. And here's tea, so we shall just have a nice, comfortable couple of hours afterward."

"You must not forget to speak to Miss Penrose, brother," Emily reminded him. "This is the best time—indeed the only time to catch her free, I think Catherine said."

"Eh? What? Miss Penrose?" said he. "Oh, ay. I remember about Catherine. Oh yes, I'll look in on our way to the billiard-room."

"It is so very awkward for my sister and me being here all alone, you see, Lord Hartland," explained Miss Gilbert, turning to him for further sympathy. "Being here without any other lady, is really very awkward. So Frederick is going to apply to the governess to have Catherine begin her holidays sooner than the others, in order that we may have her. Although Catherine is made such a school-girl of, she is really quite old enough to go about now, and so Etta and I have been telling her."

("You have, have you?" thought Hartland. "Rosamund won't thank you for that.")

"Oh, Catherine is quite companionable," subjoined Etta. "If we had Catherine, we should not mind at

all how long Rosamund stayed away,"—here she caught a scowl from Emily,—“I mean, of course—of course for our own sakes; of course we are dreadfully sorry for *her*—”

“Etta always makes a muddle whenever she begins to talk, Lord Hartland; she only means that we should not mind for the *awkward* part of it. Of course we miss dear Rosamund dreadfully,” apologized the elder sister.

He bowed.

“When do you think she will be able to return? To-morrow, or next day? Candidly, you know.”

“Certainly not to-morrow, nor the next day.”

“By the end of the week?”

“I hardly think that either.”

“Eh! what? Not by the end of the week?” put in Gilbert, with his cup halfway to his lips. “Lord! you don’t mean that Makin says that? Why, bless my soul! how very—what an awful pity! How beastly unfortunate! Well”—after a long drink and a careful wiping of his heavy mustache—“well, we must put up with it, I suppose, and do our best to get along without her. But—” and he set down his cup on the tray ruefully.

“There is one thing,” said Lord Hartland, with considerable hesitation, “that Lady Julia wished me to speak about. She was sure that you would agree with her as to the advisability of saying as little about this as possible. We do not want every one to be talking and gossiping about Rosamund—”

—“To be sure not. Keep it dark, certainly, or we shall have the poor girl bothered to death,” assented her betrothed readily.

“And perhaps—perhaps for that reason—my aunt thought”—stammered Hartland, disliking his commission intensely—“she thought it might be as well for you not to be seen coming over to the Abbey every day. You see,” he added, as the faces of all betrayed surprise, “it might get wind, and give rise

to suspicion that the illness was more serious than it is."

"But I don't understand. I may go surely, if the girls don't," said Gilbert. "Considering how we stand to each other, and everybody knows about it by this time, I—upon my word—I can't see why my going should bear that interpretation."

"You would not go if she had a mere cold, or headache?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Gilbert, laughing, while his bronzed face colored with a lover's shamefacedness, which became him well,—“I am afraid I—I should be very much inclined to.”

Lord Hartland rose and walked to the window. It was hard on him to have this just then—just when he wanted to find in Rosamund's betrothed only the jolly, rollicking, underbred good fellow, and to forget all that it was inconvenient to remember of anything else. When apart from the lovers, and more especially when in Lady Julia's company, he could almost persuade himself that a man of Gilbert's temperament, with no refined feelings nor acute perceptions, could not in the nature of things appreciate his cousin, and it need not therefore be feared that more than his importance and his self-complacency would suffer, were she to give him up.

In the depths of his own heart, to be sure, confidence would occasionally falter; but he liked to hear his aunt say as much, and could, at times, almost work upon himself to agree with her. Then would come some little word, or acknowledgment such as the above, to undo all, and cause a moment or two of acute agony. He would not show his face during such a moment.

"Since the fates are adverse, I suppose I must give in, however," quoth Gilbert presently. "There's no fighting against fate; and of course I would not be such a selfish brute as to do anything to worry Rosamund. I dare say she is best let alone—only I thought

that perhaps she—she won't fancy I am neglect her, will she?"

"Certainly not. I will take care of that," replied her cousin, steadying his voice as best he could, by Lady Julia's assurances and asseverations ringing in his ears. "And I really think, Gilbert—I really think that she is better off undisturbed, and that it is her own wish to be so. Invalids, you know, have their fancies," still painfully evasive of Gilbert's eye, "Rosamund is undoubtedly far from well. The doctor told me so himself. He said these nervous attacks were not to be trifled with."

"To be sure they are not. I have no doubt the doctor knows best, and will bring her round all presently," replied the disconsolate lover, endeavoring to recover himself. "I am thankful to say I know what nerves are. There are no such things in our family, are there, girls?"

"No, indeed," laughed they.

"I wonder what our old mother would say to a girl of eighteen having nervous attacks," proceeded the brother. "I say, you two, we must keep it dark from her about this, mind."

"I had thought of that already, brother," replied Emily, "and though I wrote home this morning, I said nothing about it. Mother wouldn't understand except that, of course, Lady Caroline's death—"

"To be sure, yes; we must make the most of Lady Caroline's death," assented he cheerfully. "Now that every one's done, we'll go to the billiard-room. Come, girls—I say, you two, it's like old times to have you hanging about one again," and he tucked an arm through that of each sister, and led the way.

He played well, as he did most things. His clean caroms, straight hazards, and the manner in which he left the balls disposed for the success of the next stroke, speedily showed him a much greater proficiency than his opponent, who scored his highest break of ten and twelve with satisfaction, and accepted

"flukes," which would have discomposed Gilbert, with an alacrity that was positively discreditable.

The sisters—albeit openly on Frederick's side, as in duty bound—consoled and encouraged, and at length found their sympathies so strongly enlisted for the one so far behind, that Etta was caught marking stealthily to Hartland a handsome score of her brother's.

Merriment and raillery were the immediate consequence.

("Ay, ay!" thought Gilbert, "ay, ay! is that what you are up to, miss? Lord, what a joke that would be! Hartland and Etta! Lord, what would the pater say to that! The old gentleman would not know himself. But I said how it would be, before ever I brought the girls here. There's Hartland for the one, and Jack Stoneby for the other.")

Before the evening was over, he was shouting with laughter over a new idea.

("Old Liscard taken with Emily! O Lord! O Lord! I shall never get over it! If it really is so, it would be the richest thing I ever knew in my life. And I'll lay any money it is so. I never saw anything like it before,—nor, I'll wager, has any one else. He was making up to her the whole of dinner; talking away like a perfect parrot; and he would not stop ten minutes in the dining-room after they left—Kant and Cicero could not have held him there with cartropes,—and to see him, over the piano, beating time and wagging his old head,—and they say he is to show them all over his library to-morrow morning, and take them a drive in the afternoon! Oh, my dear Rosamund, what nuts this will be for you! I should say she'd be as glad as I, if anything really does come out of it. Well, he's not such an old boy neither; and he had a sorry time of it with that vixen of a Lady Caroline; he is quite right to chirp up a bit, and have a little pleasure in life yet. Em's the very girl to suit him. To be sure, there are the children; but they are young, and I should say the girls would soon go

off. Catherine is not a patch upon Rosamund, but she's well enough. Dolly will be good-looking. Anyway, that's their concern, and I know one thing, I should be uncommonly well pleased. I should die of laughing. It would be the rummest idea. Now, I wonder," more seriously, "I do wonder whether any notion of the kind has struck Hartland. Hartland is such a moony chap that I should not be one bit surprised if he had seen nothing; if it had all passed off like water off a duck's back."

Hartland had, however, seen enough, and more than enough. On his part he had never felt less inclined to laugh in his life.

Here's a fresh complication with a vengeance.

It was not quite the agreeable jest to him that it was to the lady's brother, that his scholarly and refined relative, hitherto the personification of pedantry and respectability, as to whom there had formerly been but one feeling, that of consideration and good-will,—it could not be to him quite what it was to Gilbert, to see the elderly widower blossom out into a new character.

Now, it was perfectly true that not only had Mr. Liscard conversed incessantly with Emily Gilbert during dinner, but that the most laborious and long-winded instructions, the prosings which even Gilbert when on his promotion had surreptitiously yawned beneath, had been, to all appearance, hearkened to with the profoundest sympathy and interest by Gilbert's sister. The host had been intelligently questioned at due intervals. He had been drawn out, and led on, as it had scarcely ever been his fortune to be encouraged hitherto. Beneath such treatment he had expanded and thriven, as no one could have helped doing.

In the evening he had joined the ladies far sooner than he had ever before been known to quit the comforts of the well-warmed room and glowing wine-cups. He had made some excuse for doing so certainly, but

the excuse had been a slight one, and it had been obvious to all present that the attraction of good company had been the sole and flattering cause of the change. He had invited Catherine to join the proposed drive next day. Catherine had been quite in luck, and had seen that it was her interest to be compliant and agreeable; and, in consequence, there had been no more seriousness nor disapprobation from her,—Catherine, as we know, being one ever to fall in with the times, whereas Rosamund would fight to the death for a principle or a prejudice.

But the sight to see had been Rosamund's papa over the music. On Gilbert's proposing music, he had seconded the move, not with his usual gentle, passive acquiescence, but in a manner unseen before—he had himself stepped across the room with candles, and fumbled with the slides of the piano.

In former times when Lady Caroline, who had supposed herself a musician, had requested to be favored by some guest, the inevitable response, and that which had been known to suit the petitioner, had been some dreary fugue, or grim, uncompromising sonata. Now the old piano scarcely knew itself. Until the two Miss Gilberts came, it had not been opened since the death in the house; but on that first evening after their arrival, in Rosamund's softened mood, she had been glad to consent to anything, and Catherine had known what to expect on the following night. True, the instrument was somewhat out of tune, for the tuner had been ordered away on the occasion of his last visit; but this did not greatly afflict the general ear of the company assembled. Gilbert's voice was equal to drowning any accompaniment, and Emily was almost equally independent.

They had sung together and apart, urging each other on, and inciting to further effort; and at the end of every performance, Mr. Liscard had applauded and admired. *It had even been drawn from him that once upon a time, before he had become a married*

man, and when he had had nothing else to think of, he had himself dabbled with the flute; and further inquiries had elicited the fact that the said flute was still in existence. Yes, it was certainly somewhere—he could not positively say where—and it was many a year since it had seen light. But still—and when Hartland had heard him hesitatingly promise to look about among his old cabinets on the following day, and see if it could be found, and if anything could be done with it—he had felt that although he had himself heard Lady Julia remark on the pity it was that the musical proclivities of her brother-in-law had never been looked kindly upon heretofore, she would hardly have cared to have heard them acknowledged on the present occasion.

He was certainly taking more notice of these Gilbert girls than was at all necessary,—and more, his doing so was making it momentarily more improbable that they would fall in with the wishes and hopes which were entertained at the Abbey, for their speedy vanishing from the scene. Was it likely they would want to go, when all was being made so pleasant for them to stay? Mr. Liscard himself, from whom no hospitality had ever before been expected, and who was generally supposed not to know who was in the house and who out of it—here had he been foremost in the task of entertaining! With his evident approval, Catherine had been emancipated, for the purpose of rendering the young ladies easy in their minds; and there had been rumors of excursions here and there, and driving parties and what not, which had made the whole air festive. There had not been a syllable throughout to intimate any idea of cutting short the visit.

"No, ma'am, I can't say there was," he was forced to allow, in answer to the next morning's cross-questioning, for Lady Julia had retired, as he had meant her to do, ere he had returned home the night before. "I expect the Miss Gilberts will make out their time."

You can hardly expect them to change their plans all in a moment, and they seem very happy, and quite at home where they are."

"They are sure to be 'at home' wherever they are," replied his aunt. "I dare say, indeed I quite believe, they may be very respectable, well-inclined young women in their own sphere of life; but here they are placed in a completely false position. If they could only be brought to see this—if there were any one to put it before them—"

"You should ask your brother-in-law to do so," said Hartland dryly.

"Theodore! Dear me, Hartland, what are you thinking of? Poor Theodore never was of the slightest use to any one even in Caroline's days, and now—by the way, does he appear in the evenings? Was he there after dinner last night?"

"Very much there."

"And how did it pass? What did you do? How did they behave?"

"Oh, it passed very well; everybody was very lively; and Catherine sat at the head of the table."

"Catherine! That child!"

"You would not have had a Miss Gilbert do so?"

"No, no; you are right. Catherine was better than no one; and she was at least a daughter of the house, though a mere school-girl. But it was a fine chance for Catherine, with my poor Rosamund lying here—"

"—Tell Rosamund; it will make her laugh."

"She laughs at nothing now," said Lady Julia, very gravely. "Oh, Hartland, I am really disappointed; I had so hoped you would bring me some good news for her. I know what she needs more than anything is to hear that these visitors have departed. It had seemed to me—and I told her so, poor darling—that they *must* go, that there was no other course open; and *though* when I assured Rosamund of this, she *made no reply*, I know it comforted her. And now—"

oh dear !” and she sighed sorrowfully, “ I had even hoped they might have fixed to start to-morrow.”

“ To-morrow they are all going for a drive to Wingleford Ruins.”

“ All ? Who do you mean by ‘ all,’ my dear ? ”

“ Mr. Liscard, and Catherine, and the two Miss Gilberts.”

“ Theodore ! ” exclaimed Lady Julia, in fresh surprise.

“ Yes, indeed,” and he looked at her curiously.

But she had not seen Theodore over the piano and the Irish songs, nor heard the pretty speeches which had evoked the still prettier responses.

She was in consequence only impressed by the superfluity of the compassion which had induced the scholar to leave his books, and trot the insignificant Gilberts about the country ; he had always, she knew, favored the match, and doubtless, having done so from the first, he now felt bound to back his approval ; and being thrown entirely on his own resources, had outdone all that was necessary. Catherine too, eager for the frolic, had probably egged him on. Between them they were doing her darling all the mischief they could, and she could have cried to think how powerless she was to prevent it.

“ You say Mrs. Waterfield and Eleanour were there when you went,” she began again, presently. “ What do you suppose Mrs. Waterfield thought of Rosamund’s future sisters ? ”

“ She hardly stayed a minute after I arrived.”

“ Had she called on *them*, or had she merely gone to inquire after Rosamund ? ”

“ That I can not tell. But she certainly did inquire very affectionately after Rosamund.”

“ And she expected to find her at King’s Common ? ”

“ Can’t tell that either, Aunt Julia. She did not say so.”

“ Did you say plainly that Rosamund would remain here for the present ? ”

"I did."

"And what did they all say to that?"

"I think Major Gilbert was very much disappointed."

"I did not mean him—I meant the rest of them."

"I can not remember that they said anything in particular."

"You might at least tell me *something*, Hartland."

It really seemed cruel that after being a whole evening away from her, and in the midst of the objectionable and all-absorbing circle, he should produce nothing wherewith to compensate for his absence; and finding it so himself, he could only suggest that if he were to repeat the amusement he would try to do better.

"Go there again! This evening?" cried she, the same fancy which had occurred to Gilbert glaring in all its horrors full at her. "Oh, my dear Hartland, surely *you* are not being drawn on to—to care for the company of those people? Surely you went last night for Rosamund's sake—to keep up appearances—to act civilly,—not—not because you enjoyed yourself?" There was something almost ludicrous in the tremor of her tone.

"My dear aunt—" then he stopped short, as he understood what she meant. He was not in a mood to play with her; he could not even be amused by her tortures.

"Set your mind at rest," he said. "Those poor girls have no more thought of me than I of them. And, on my part, I can assure you that I should never fall in love with either, if there were not another woman in the world."

In a moment all Lady Julia's benevolence returned. "Poor things! I am certainly very unjust to them; I am sure I am quite ashamed. It is not their fault that they do not belong to our grade in society, that they are inferior in their manners and appearance; *and they are really* very good-looking, and Emily is

almost ladylike. I am so put out about Rosamund that you must see, Hartland, I hardly know what I am talking about. Pray, my dear Hartland, do whatever you think right about going. Go to-night, if you think it best. If it is at all necessary—"

—"Oh, not necessary."

—"But *do*—pray *do* ; for my sake do, and it will show there is no ill-feeling. I can positively assure you, now that I think of it, that I should prefer your spending your evening elsewhere, because then I shall feel free to spend mine in Rosamund's room. Now that you have quite set my fears at rest—" and it ended in his agreeing to go, if only to pacify her.

But he told himself afterward that it was as well he had done so. Upon this second evening, things were even more amazing than before, and he had nothing to do but to stare and stand by.

It appeared that the expedition had been a great success ; that a couple of hours had been spent in exploring and meandering ; that Mr. Liscard had been the most wonderful authority and guide ; that the drive had been undertaken in the morning, because the sky had looked threatening ; and that after the return of the party, the rest of the afternoon had been spent in the seclusion of the library ;—tea also—wonder of wonders !—having been served in that venerable spot. Catherine, who now seemed to be part and parcel of the whole affair, gleefully informed her cousin of the fun, or at least of so much of it as had taken place up to date, and he himself was a witness of the remainder. Again he beheld his host all cheerfulness and animation, and marked that his own especial chair, to which he had in old days been wont to retreat as a matter of course, again remained empty throughout the evening. On this occasion, furthermore, there were continual allusions to little epochs of the day, references to this and that occurrence, sallies whose points were for the initiated only. Gilbert was not present, nor was any one but himself,—but he

found that the Stonebys had been invited for the next evening ; and he heard—yes, he was certain he heard—Miss Gilbert besought to remember that she was not to yield up her place to Clementina Stoneby,—that whoever was present, *her* chair was at her host's right hand.

“ By Jove ! ma'am, I have some news for you at last ”—he went home in the end, boiling over with indignation and imprudence—“ news that will satisfy any extent of craving, I should say. Look here, Aunt Julia, what do you say to this ? If Rosamund does not look sharp and get well soon, she will find herself, on her return, provided with an embryo—stepmother.”

CHAPTER XXX.

HAD ROSAMUND BEEN THERE !

" If a daughter you have, she's the plague of your life ;
No peace shall you have, though you've buried your wife !
At twenty she mocks at the duty you've taught her.
Sighing and whining,
Dying and pining,
Oh, what a plague is an obstinate daughter ! "

— *The Duenna.*

" IF Rosamund does not get well sharp, she will find herself, on her return home, provided with an embryo stepmother ! "

Such a prediction was enough to chill any one's blood, and to attempt to depict Lady Julia's feelings on hearing it were useless.

This was now the third shock which Fate had thrust into her hitherto easy life within a few brief months. Her sister's death had cost her many tears and tender recollections ; Rosamund's engagement had been a bitter and daily renewed disappointment of her fondest hopes ; but neither event had roused half such a passion of amazement and horror as that which now shook her soul to its very depths.

Of all people in the world, Theodore !

Her reliable, respectable brother-in-law, who, although he might count for nothing in the family, was presumed to fulfill all requirements in the eyes of the world, and to be as phlegmatic, and obtuse, and safe, as a man and a husband and a father could possibly be ! That he should be the next rock ahead !

It had been such an understood thing that he would not be put out of his way by Rosamund's guests, since none but Lady Caroline had ever been suffered to in-

terfere with any single one of his habits of gentle selfishness—(and even her imperious ladyship had, as a rule, respected the motto, "Live and let live," with a spouse who gave her so wide a berth and so little trouble)—it had, we say, been so well understood that the Miss Gilberts would be nothing to their host, that he had not been taken into account at all.

It had been felt that only by their presence at meals would he know the girls were still in the house, and certainly no one had ever dreamed that he would so much as inquire in what manner they had passed the intervals.

When a man's line of conduct is thus taken for granted, he is in a great measure hedged in by it; and had Rosamund, with her flashing eye and apt speech, sat in her mother's seat, it may be confidently asserted that there would have been enough of the deceased Lady Caroline haunting the air to have turned aside the winged arrows with which it was now bristling. But no one had been by, and the affair had grown like magic.

On the first evening the widower had experienced a passive sensation of being pleased and amused; on the second he had exerted himself; and on the third and fourth no exertion had been needed.

It was known to none, scarce even to himself, how and why he had crept year by year into an ever smaller niche in life, and had shrunk and shrunk in order to avoid contact and friction; so that now his dead wife had only herself to thank if, in the elasticity of spirits consequent on the removal of a grievous pressure, he did not even outwardly affect to mourn her as he should have done; and if at the first pleasant thing which offered, the smile of a pretty face and the accosting of a merry voice, the dry, withered, unused nature, which had still a germ of life within, should feel the beatings of a new and delicious sensation. Hartland might be disgusted, and Lady Julia outraged, but had they known mankind better, they

needed not to have been so stricken with amazement as now they were.

"How odd, how unlike himself, Mr. Liscard is to-night!"

Clementina Stoneby was the next person to note something that she had never seen before, on passing the following evening at King's Common, in company with her brother. It may be remembered that Lord Hartland had heard they had been bidden there. "I can not understand Mr. Liscard at all," pondered she in perplexity, as she stood by the drawing-room mantel-piece after dinner. "I always thought he pretended to read, and really went to sleep, in the evenings. He does not seem at all inclined to sleep to-night. He is quite the host. A flower in his buttonhole, too! All the times I have dined in this house, I don't think I have ever seen him with a flower in his buttonhole before." She was looking at the object of her reflections as she made them. He was briskly stepping across the room, calling "Music! music!" as he went, while Catherine was bustling about the piano, attentive and dutiful, and cognizant of what was going forward, and a servant was placing a music-stand where no music-stand had ever been placed before, and arranging lights near.

In front of this stand the astonished Stonebys now beheld their host take up his position, while his daughter and the Miss Gilberts with animation surrounded and encouraged him. What was going to happen next?

Clementina could scarcely credit her own vision when she perceived the outcome of all the preparation—namely, the dignified, abstracted scholar of former days screwing together and putting to his lips a silvery flute, from whence presently emanated somewhat tremulously a sweet, old-fashioned, almost-forgotten melody.

He had, it appeared, already delighted the young ladies; they had had a concert after tea, and he had been promised an accompaniment on the next occasion.

He now claimed fulfillment of the promise, and Emily Gilbert sat down to the piano.

"I really think they get on wonderfully well together," said Henrietta, quitting the group and rejoining the Stonebys after the first duet, "and they will do still better after a little practice."

"Oh yes, we must practice, we must practice," came at the same moment from the performers themselves; and "You must practice that run, if you please, Miss Gilbert," and "You that shake, Mr. Liscard," awoke simultaneous flattery and merriment.

Should they try the difficult passages again? No, not then,—not before an audience; they must do it in rehearsal—by themselves—when no one else was present to criticise and complain. The morning was best for rehearsing, the evening was scarcely the time. It would now be preferable to proceed to something else, and agree to meet and overcome all difficulties at a more convenient season.

"I shall be quite out in the cold once this sort of thing begins," cried Etta. "I know what I have to expect when two music-mad people get together; it is all up with the third person. I reckon these two are going to give me a pretty time of it, what with rehearsals and all the rest. Do, Miss Stoneby, have compassion on poor me, and come up and keep me company when they are at their practicing to-morrow morning."

"I am afraid I shall be busy to-morrow," quoth little Clemmy, very coldly.

"Oh, never mind, I dare say Lord Hartland will be over."

Miss Stoneby was mute.

"Perhaps he will look after Catherine and me, when he finds us left in the lurch," continued Etta; "he has been here both yesterday and the day before, and stopped dinner both times. We half expected him to-night"—(it had been more than "half," and she *had donned her smartest frock in consequence*)—"but

I suppose he did not like to leave Lady Julia," continued she. "Poor Lady Julia; it certainly would have been too bad to desert her three times running, and if I were she, I know I should have been in a huff as it is."

"It is no new thing," observed Clementina briefly. "Lord Hartland is always here. He looks upon King's Common as a second home."

"Does he? But why? They are not near relations."

"As near as any he has."

"La! how strange that must be, Miss Stoneby. We have such heaps and heaps."

"Have you indeed?"

"Thirty-six first cousins on father's side, and twenty-two on mother's. We do make a to-do when a lot of us get together."

"I dare say."

"I never was in any house full of children where they made so little noise as they do here," proceeded Etta confidentially. "To think that there are nine still in the house, even with Rosamund and the two big boys away! If Lord Hartland comes here to be cheerful—" and she laughed expressively. She and Emily had had their own opinion on the matter, and had agreed upon it perfectly. They did not think Lord Hartland came over to be cheered by the children, nor yet because the place was his "second home."

"You do not see King's Common to advantage now," said Clementina, who reflected that at any rate she did not. "It is not always so melancholy as this."

"Is it not? La!" cried Etta. "Mr. Liscard told a different story yesterday. He said to Em that the old place was not like itself with us two about, and I don't know what all about sunbeams and rays of light. He has been making Em ever so many pretty speeches. And as for her, she thinks him quite a dear. For my

part,"—and the young lady sank her voice, and languished behind her fan,—“for my part, I prefer Lord Hartland. I own I do like young men better than old—don't you?”

(“Good gracious, what next?” cried Clementina to herself.)

“I have no doubt we should have seen Lord Hartland here to-night, only that I scolded him so for leaving Lady Julia twice before,” proceeded the speaker, inviting an attack in vain. “I told him that really—”

—“Really I think it must be our time to go,” cried Clemmy, starting up; and she actually did manage to effect an exit, and carry Jack off with her, a full hour before they would otherwise have gone.

“I could stand it no longer. I really could not have contained myself another minute,” fumed the little steam-engine, panting away homeward. “That impudent, impudent girl! Oh you should have heard her insinuations and her affectations! It is by way of being herself and Lord Hartland, and her sister and Mr. Liscard. But, oh, Jack, the worst, by far the worst, is that I fear there really is—is some truth, some horrible, degrading truth in the last idea. In the first I do *not* believe, but in the second—oh dear, oh dear—I shall never forget this evening. Oh, Jack, did you see—did you hear—but I know you did; I could tell by your face that you both heard and saw.”

“Go on. Tell what you saw.”

“It dawned upon me toward the end of dinner. I began to think that Mr. Liscard was wonderfully sociable and wonderfully cheerful; usually he is neither, you know—at any rate, until the dessert is on the table. He looks neither to right nor to left while he eats. And I felt that he might have remembered to be a little more particular not to have laughed quite so much, and been so full of anecdotes and jests, before the servants,—because servants do talk, and of course Lady Caroline has not been three months dead

yet ; but it was not till there was all that drinking of healths and clinking of glasses at the end, that I began to feel how very disagreeable it was becoming. That was why we were asked, I suppose ? To take off Henrietta and Catherine, and leave those two to each other. Horrid old man ! I feel as if I could never speak to him, never look at him again."

"To be sure he has been rather quick over it," replied Jack coolly, "but I always thought it would come. He is not altogether the pensive student whose part it suited Lady Caroline to have him play. I dare say you will open your eyes, but I have not much faith in his being a scholar at all. I fancy he saw it was his only chance of being anything—and, moreover, it secured him a quiet life. He is indolent and selfish, and if he had not taken up the line he did, he would have found himself endlessly embroiled, and to very little purpose. Lady Caroline would have had her own way in the long run, and he had the sense to see it."

"Sense !" cried his sister. "He is showing his sense now, is he not ? Tooting on a flute with a camellia in his buttonhole, to a girl scarcely older than his own daughter !"

"It is hardly decent just yet, I own," assented Jack moderately, "but, upon my word, I scarcely know how to blame him. Recollect, my austere Clementina, that this is the first temptation of the kind which has probably ever befallen the poor gentleman—"

"Temptation !" cried the little, busy, workaday, parishing woman, who had no corner in her heart for so much as a weakness, save in the straight, legitimate, prosaic, matrimonial form. "Temptation ! A man between fifty and sixty, who ought never to be thinking of such things ! If he did mean to have a second wife—"

"Pooh ! that is not the question. He is merely basking in a bit of sunshine now."

"How *can* you talk of it like that?"

Jack laughed. Men do laugh at such questions.

"Well, all I know is," proceeded Clementina, hot and angry, "that as long as Emily Gilbert remains at King's Common, I, for one, shall not set foot within the house again."

Jack laughed afresh.

"What is it? What amuses you?"

"Because we are going there again to-morrow," said he.

He had been invited point-blank by Mr. Liscard himself, who had been very well satisfied with the way in which his convenient neighbors had done their part; fulfilled the end for which they had been invited; kept clear of the piano; and maintained the chat at the other end of the room. In the plenitude of his good-humor he had caught the rector and engaged him and his sister for the next evening—they were the only people he could so invite; and Jack, not seeing the affair in the light Clementina did, had accepted with tolerable alacrity. Like Hartland, he required distraction at this time.

Besides, it was such fun to make Clemmy really wroth, and wroth to the last degree she now was, and she was clattering and chattering along as fast as her little feet and her little tongue could go, when they turned in at their own gate, and beheld a figure in the clear moonlight before them. It was Lord Hartland, who had strolled down for a smoke and a consultation, the rectory being, as we know, but ten minutes' walk from his own house.

"Well, what did you see, and what did you think?" was his greeting. "I knew where you were to be to-night, and that you would be home about now. Well?"

The brother and sister glanced at each other.

"Oh, it's all right; I know all about it," continued Hartland. "Queer idea, isn't it? Of course it would never do. Imagine a Miss Gilbert succeeding Lady Caroline Verelst! No, no; it can't be done. We

must conspire to defeat it. If poor Rosamund were only about—" but then he stopped, for one and all were thinking the same thought—namely, that poor Rosamund had enough ado to manage her own affairs, and, moreover, had not succeeded so perfectly with them as to warrant her being intrusted with those of others.

But since all had been equally behind the scenes at King's Common, there was obviously now no need for reticence ; and the driving, and flirting, and fluting now going on in the house over whose portico the black escutcheon was still fresh, was discussed through all its length and breadth.

"Rosamund ought at any rate to know of it," concluded Hartland, with much decision. "And I shall certainly tell her. I shall see her on purpose. Tomorrow afternoon she is coming into the boudoir—it is a dead secret, but she is—and I shall see her, and tell her."

No one had any objection to make, and he prepared to depart.

"How is she, Hartland?" said Jack softly.

"She is—just what Aunt Julia chooses to call it, Jack."

"You don't think the illness serious?"

"No, I don't."

"Is Gilbert admitted to see her yet?"

"No."

"But you are?"

"I am nothing of the kind—but I mean to admit myself. After what we have agreed to to-night, I consider it is my duty to see Rosamund and put her on her guard. My aunt is not to be trusted ; and with Rosamund's temper—"

"I don't know what you all mean by speaking of Rosamund's temper," suddenly blazed forth a little, shrill voice. "Rosamund would have as good a temper as any one, and be as kind and good and sweet as any one, if she were only let alone. She likes having

her own way—oh, I know why you look so ; you think she has got it, and no good has come of it. There is something wrong about this engagement, and you both blame Rosamund. Now, how can you possibly know that Rosamund is to blame? I am sure she is unhappy—perhaps she sees she has made a mistake—perhaps Major Gilbert, nice as he is, does not quite, altogether satisfy her, and—and—and—oh, I don't know anything about it, I may be quite wrong, only I can not bear to hear my dear, dear Rosamund spoken of so unkindly, and you ought not to do it, and you *shall* not before me," further cried the valiant little creature, darting away into the porch with a suspicious tremble in her voice, and a resolution that neither Jack nor any one else should have a chance of answering.

In a sort of maze, Lord Hartfield's eyes followed the retreating figure. Then he turned, and in the clear moonlight faced his friend. "God bless her for the words," he said. "See here, Jack,—we—I—I don't know how you feel, but if I dared, I would tell your sister that—God help me—Rosamund needs no champion with me. I have learned—too late—that I—I must not dare to take her part"; and he turned his head aside.

A hand was laid on his shoulder.

"I have been a fool," continued the speaker brokenly. "I had my chance, and I did not think it worth the picking up. Another, a better, a braver, and an honester man came by, and saw the value of the prize. He won it, and—heaven pity him, Stoneby—he thinks he has it, and it is all a mockery and illusion. She does not love him ; she had almost ceased to care for him the moment he was in her power ; she would fain have spurned him from her feet afterwards. And now—" and a too significant silence supplied the rest.

There was a long pause, and at length Stoneby spoke. "I understand," he said, in clear, deliberate tones, "and this is not altogether new to me, though I had *hoped*, almost against hope, that I might have

been mistaken. There is then but one honorable course for your cousin to take; she must confess all to Gilbert, and throw him over."

"And that she will not do."

"Has any one tried her?"

"Do not ask me," said Hartland. "Before Heaven, Stoneby, I was innocent of any other motive than that of indignation at Gilbert's wrongs, when I—I—yes, I did it; I urged her to tell him the truth. I thought then, I think now, that an open, unflinching confession of the injustice she has done him would be the only means of preventing her doing him a greater. Besides, there is another course, and sometimes—I fear—she is trying it."

"You mean, to disgust him."

"Something of the kind—yes. But this is only the merest, vaguest conjecture. She may never have thought of it; and her petulance and coldness *may* only be the result of her own disappointment,—but I have thought—I have wondered at his patience under it. Most men—I, myself—would not have endured such treatment for a moment. I should have seen known that it could proceed from but one cause."

"Gilbert sees nothing?"

"He is too noble to doubt her," said Hartland, in a low voice.

"And you say you admonished your cousin?"

"I did, in the plainest terms. She thought me cruel and unfeeling, and I think I played the calm observer well. But I fear to look into my own heart, Stoneby: I dread to find what I know is there. Rosamund's happiness is dearer, far dearer to me than it ought to be, and what is the result? When I see her unjust and contemptuous toward the man she has made her own, it maddens me with a kind of pain I delight to feel. I could reproach her, torture her, almost tear her in pieces for her cruelty, and yet love her a thousandfold the more because of it. I could clasp her in my arms, and crush her, at the same time

She can not be Gilbert's wife. He deserves a better fate. . . . She shall not be sacrificed to him. She has suffered already enough. . . . It is a sin to treat a man as she does her lover. He has done nothing to merit it. He . . . She . . ."—he passed his hand over his brow. "I don't think I quite know what I am saying," he murmured.

"It does not matter with me, you know," said his friend, very kindly.

"Oh, I am such a fool—such an utter fool!" groaned Hartland afresh. "Look here now, I say; what do you suppose I care about my so-called uncle and his idiotic flirtation? It is very beastly of him, but I don't suppose anything real or tangible will come of it; but here have I set my heart on going to Rosamund with all, and she will break her heart anew over it, that's what she will do—because—because—can't you see, Jack?—because I must see her, and I must have an excuse to see her, and to make her see me; and then, perhaps, who knows?—something—something—may be said—ah, don't look at me so, I say," throwing him off with a fling; "I know all that you would say. Just hold your tongue, will you? I am going to see Rosamund, and all you can say or do shall not prevent me."

"I am not seeking to prevent you, dear Hartland."

"You—you—oh, I know well enough what you are saying to yourself. It is what I should say to myself also, if I were not a scoundrel and a hypocrite. I have been shamming, Jack—I tell you, shamming: I have been imposing upon you all—and upon myself, more than any, heaven forgive me! Oh, I have been so impartial and superior, and have looked down from such heights upon the poor foolish pair entangled in their own net, and have discussed the situation so paternally, while all the time—! You would not have thought it of me, would you, Stoneby? *I think even a few days ago, when we were all at that merry luncheon-party, and Rosamund was so playful,*

and every one so pleasant—I think even then none of you guessed what I was feeling. I did it well, on the whole. Aunt Julia thought me harsh toward her spoilt darling, and almost melted my obdurate heart by her representations. I was to be kind to poor Rosamund, forsooth! I was not to think so hardly of her Rosamund, her own dear Rosamund! Little she guessed that every tender epithet she used, and every plea she put forward, gave me a new delight. They were brands thrown upon a fire that was already burning. I have deceived you all—yes, you too, Stoneby, you whom I pretended to take into confidence, and have been as false to you as to the rest."

"This is not being false."

"There are no secrets between us now, at any rate," proceeded Hartland, with a bitter laugh; "you have got to the bottom of the well at last, and I hope you like what you find there. It is a fine mixture, is it not?"

Stoneby said nothing.

"I suppose you are shocked?"

There was another pause.

"Hartland," said Stoneby at last.

"Well?"

"If I were to tell you that I feel for you as I never did for any other man,—that I think, I know you have manfully struggled to overcome a terrible calamity, and that, whatever you may accuse yourself of, no one else will ever find you chargeable in this matter, or feel for you anything but the purest honor and esteem—would you believe me?"

"Do you—mean that?" said Hartland slowly.

"I do, indeed."

"I thought—I thought—I seemed to myself such a coward, almost a liar—"

"Why? Because you sought to hide, even from yourself, a feeling which you were powerless to prevent, which, coming as it did, at such a time, was torture? What was there false or dishonorable in that?"

You have never breathed a word, never sought by word or deed, to undermine Gilbert's rightful influence—"

"Never—never. If she had been happy, or even if she had *not* been happy, so that she had played him fair, I would have stifled the very earliest breath of another feeling." The words shook and faltered—but not from hesitation—on his lips.

"I am sure you would,—I know you would."

"But still it arose," said Hartland; "and, what is more, it thrives apace. I know not what it feeds upon. I have not seen my cousin since that day when you were there,—how and why do I love her already ten times more than I did then? The night before, I had been very angry with her, very unsparring toward her,—on that day we met almost as strangers, we never addressed each other, we avoided each other's eyes,—and now, I can think of nothing and of no one else. By night and day she is before me, with those mournful, hunted, stag-like eyes turned now on one, now on another, as they were on that wretched day. I saw them, though they were never once lifted toward me. I must see them again—I tell you, I must see them again."

CHAPTER XXXI.

HARTLAND'S MANEUVER.

"And I have acted well my part—
Have made my cheek belie my heart—
Returned the freezing glance she gave,—
Yet felt the while that woman's slave."

—BYRON.

ALL the next day Hartland hung about restless and unsettled, sharply demanding the reason of every sound, or bell, or wheel, and watching the opening of every door.

His cousin was not to leave her room until four o'clock, but he began to prepare for that hour long before.

In the first place, he dispatched a note to Major Gilbert, for the ostensible purpose of conveying Lady Julia's bulletin of the patient, but whose real object lay in a casual line to the effect that if he should be in Longminster that afternoon, he would look Gilbert up on the chance of finding him in between four and five o'clock.

Such a hint would, he knew, be amply sufficient to keep the hospitable soldier in quarters until after all hopes of its fulfillment had passed—by which time he was welcome to go where he would. It was a shabby stratagem, for which the writer heartily despised himself,—nothing being further from his thoughts than to appear either at Longminster or at the barracks that day,—but he felt that the Abbey must be secured from invasion at all hazards, and could think of nothing else likely to accomplish the desired end. Gilbert was invariably attentive to him, and proud of any attention received in return, and he had not called often

enough to make the civility common. He could reckon on the effect the note would produce.

The next person to be disposed of was his aunt. With Lady Julia hovering round, intercepting every remark, answering for Rosamund at every turn, betraying every thought of her limpid bosom, and effectively preventing his discovering and observing anything for himself, the hour would be shorn of half its wealth. She must be amicably put out of the way; and to that end he ordered her carriage at a quarter past four, and went in search of her with a scheme in his head.

"Have you any objection to driving over to King's Common this afternoon?" he inquired carelessly; "it might be as well to go, might it not?"

"This afternoon, my dear? My feeling just now is, that I must keep as far away from King's Common as ever I can."

"But your influence, Aunt Julia—"

"My influence, my dear—what is *my* influence?" cried the little spinster with the utmost vivacity. "I never had any influence,—I never shall have any. Theodore and I have always agreed very well—though I do think he rather likes to talk to me of dead-and-gone people in books, because he knows I never heard of them—but on the whole we are good enough friends. Only I feel that he despises me, and that if Caroline had let him he would have shown it long ago."

He opened his eyes.

"Oh, I did not in the least mind," continued she. "Caroline never would have permitted him or any one else to be rude to me, and while she and the dear children loved me—" She stopped, with watery eyes.

"And now my only reason for mentioning this," presently resumed the speaker, "is to prove that nothing I can do would have the slightest effect upon my brother-in-law. If it were you"—she paused—"if you were to remonstrate he might listen to you."

and he is easily frightened, easily managed by those of whom he is in awe; poor Caroline had no trouble with him—”

—“Just so,” said Hartland; “the trouble comes afterward. When a man has been in leading-strings all his life, he hardly knows what to do with his liberty when he is turned loose at fifty.”

“He ought to think of his family, his connections, his reputation,” cried Lady Julia.

“He will think of nothing, and stick at nothing, if once he is in love,” said Hartland, with a strange look on his face.

“In love!” Lady Julia almost screamed. “In love! Oh, you would not, you could not degrade the sacred name of love by applying it to such an infatuation. In love! A man whose wife is not yet three months dead! Who has twelve children! Some of them nearly grown up. Who—who—who—oh, the whole idea is degrading and preposterous.”

“Degrading and preposterous undoubtedly—but none the less a possible fact. He is certainly giving rise to remark by his behavior, and that is bad enough. The very servants were tittering behind the screen during dinner the night I was there.”

“It is shameful—shameful.”

“And his being seen driving the girls about—a thing he has never done before—will set the villagers’ tongues wagging.”

“Yes indeed.”

“They will have come in by half-past four, Aunt Julia.”

“Am I really to go, Hartland?”

“I have already given a conditional order for your carriage, ma’am; they will bring it round, unless you send word to the contrary.”

“Thank you, my dear,” said poor Lady Julia, humbly: she was never better pleased than to be thus played the tyrant to, and he had the grace to feel ashamed as, soon after, he saw her go cheerfully

upstairs to get ready, having no notion why she was being sent, nor what she was expected to do, nor indeed with any understanding of the case at all, except that he had willed, and she must obey.

He met his deserts when she came down again.

"It is as well that you proposed this for me, my dear," she cried at once. "Rosamund has given up the idea of coming into the boudoir to-day; she thinks she will not venture. I told her I thought of going to King's Common, and she was quite pleased— anxious, indeed, that I should. Poor dear, she has not yet confided in me, though every day I hope she will. But we must first get all these Gilberts out of the way—"

—"If we can."

"Dear me, Hartland, how gloomy you look. You were much brighter a little while ago, but you have clouded over again since I came down. What is the matter? Nothing new? Nothing more?"

"Nothing, ma'am," shortly.

"You were not thinking of going with me, I suppose?"

"You will get on better without me, Aunt Julia."

"*That* I shall not; but, however, there is no occasion for your being dragged over. It is not an agreeable visit—"

"And there is no need to make it too complimentary."

"Certainly not. And were you to go, it would be decidedly too complimentary. You are quite right as usual. I shall set off by myself, then, and you will stop here to mount guard."

("A thankless guard," muttered he to himself. "And when all had turned out so luckily! I shall never again be able to manage as well. Next time, things may take their chance for me.")

The embassy returned in part baffled—but in part enlightened. Lady Julia had seen nobody, but *she had learned a good deal*. The whole party, con-

sisting of Mr. Liscard, his daughter Catherine, and Emily and Henrietta Gilbert, were over at Longminster, lunching at the barracks, and spending the afternoon in viewing the various objects of interest in the town, according to Badeley, who had added that they were not expected home till dinner-time, and that Major Gilbert was, he believed, to return with them. An orderly had ridden over in the morning with a note from the major, directly on receipt of which orders had been sent to the stables, and the young ladies had run to get ready,—he did not think there had been any talk of the project before the arrival of the orderly. The party had started soon after twelve.

(“ He had just had time to get my note, and send for them,” concluded Hartland, perceiving it all at a glance. “ So if my plans have been knocked to pieces, there is the satisfaction of knowing that others too have had theirs disconcerted.”)

It would hardly have amused him to have walked about Longminster with Etta Gilbert, preceded by Em and Mr. Liscard, and followed by Catharine and her big brother-in-law to be. He could see the party now, in his mind's eye, and a faint smile stole over his face.

Lady Julia had next, she said, driven on to the Waterfields', and Mrs. Waterfield had told her a vast amount of tell-tale.

The whole neighborhood was agog about the past week's doings at King's Common. How two handsome young ladies in the smartest of blue and red cloaks had been each day trotted through the village in Mr. Liscard's own particular mail-phaeton, the widower himself handling the ribbons, and one or other of the gay visitors on the box beside him. How they had been seen going and returning, and had evidently been long distances. People had remembered that Mr. Liscard had never driven Lady Caroline. He had either been alone, or accompanied by

some elderly male friend, when he had had the phaeton out in former times. The change had been taken note of instantly, and servants' gossip had supplied all that was required for further predictions.

"I said I did think that a great deal more had been made of it than need have been." Lady Julia had done what she could for the family credit, and thus reported her efforts. "After hearing all, I told Beatrice Waterfield that although I could not defend my brother-in-law from the charge of thoughtlessness, and want of respect to poor Caroline's memory, yet that it should be remembered that he had lived so entirely his own life, and been so much out of the way of hearing public opinion, that he probably never gave appearances a thought in the matter. What the outside world thought, never did have any weight at King's Common. Indeed, my poor sister was a little, if anything, *too* unconscious of it. It often distressed me, I know, to hear her talking away of having done this and that, as if it were quite the right thing, and in the most complete ignorance of its having any other aspect—when it had perhaps come round to my ears that the poor dear had given dire offense by the self-same act! Oh, one may be quite too independent, I really do think—"

—"Very true, Aunt Julia, but *that* you will never be. You love to consider every one. Now then, about Mrs. Waterfield. What did she say? How did she look upon your line of defense? Did she go in with you, or with the village folks? Did she—had she—I suppose she had drunk it all in, and was ready for more? Every one will be glad of a fling at King's Common now, Mrs. Waterfield at their head," he added bitterly.

"My dear, I do not think you should quite say that. Beatrice was poor Caroline's friend, and naturally she was shocked and grieved. I own I did think that *perhaps she entered on the subject rather eagerly* ;

and rather perhaps dwelt upon it more than she need have done ; but—

"Ha ! ha ! ha !" burst out Hartland. "I thought our kind friend would not be far behind the rest. So she 'dwelt upon it,' did she ? Fully and lengthily ? Missing out nothing ? Not she,—oh dear, no. It is a rare piece of fun for them all. Oh, but King's Common will afford them better sport yet. They are not half done with us yet."

"Hartland !"

She looked at him in amazement. One moment all kindness and gentleness, the next all mockery and derision. It even seemed at times as though he absolutely gloated over the havoc of all the old customs and traditions, in the wreck of what once had been.

But the laugh had been unreal, and its unmirthful tones jarred painfully upon her ear. She could not; she would not blame him for it. If only she could understand him ?

And he ? He felt that he had let her understand too much, and the mask fell on the instant.

"Seriously, my dear aunt, we must consider what is to be done. To-day's jaunt will not do much toward silencing the talkers, and to-morrow being Sunday, there will be a good attendance at church, I should say. The good souls will flock thither to see what is to be seen in the King's Common pew. What do you propose to do, ma'am ? Shall you be there ? Shall you go in the morning, as usual, or"—with a happy thought—"shall I represent you, while you stay at home with Rosamund, and I can relieve you in the afternoon ?"

"When she could come into the boudoir, instead of to-day," assented Lady Julia, in her own little easy way. "Yes, my dear, that would do nicely ; that would be by far the best way. She would like to see you, I know ; and no one else need know anything about it."

He could not help feeling that all his former *finesse*

had been wasted. Had he simply suggested in the morning what he did now, he might even at this moment have been by Rosamund's side ; and though re-animating by the new prospect, he wished he had not been so clever before.

"She will not come down to-night?" he ventured.

"Oh, my dear, no ; you have no idea how much she dreads a change of any sort. And you can understand that were she once to appear downstairs, we could not make her out to be unfit for more,—I mean—we could not quite put the same face upon her illness,—and, really a little management—I would not be untruthful for the world, but in a case of illness, you know, management and firmness are absolutely necessary. She *shall not* see those Gilberts"—and Rosamund's plump little guardian angel looked as red and determined as she had ever been seen in her life, and drew up her small roundabout person, until it positively grew in height before Hartland's eyes.

He felt he could safely trust her when in this mood

With infinite pains she now planned the next day's campaign, decided who was to be in and out at church and chapel, interviewed the clumsy Joseph, a new-comer, whose first Sunday at the Abbey it was, and who was to be porter for the afternoon (an office as often as not a sinecure, but which on this particular Sunday had risen to importance), and at the appointed hour on the morrow betook herself off down the avenue, prayer book and hymn book in hand,—but her bodily presence, it is to be feared, ever getting farther and farther away from the spirit which had been left behind.

Ah, if those had but been two lovers she had left there ! Even as matters stood, there was enough of doubt and uncertainty about them to afford a gleam of hope, and even a gleam in those dark days was *something*. She now knew for certain that Rosamund had ceased to care for Gilbert, and she knew—at

least she thought she knew—that this fact had a strange interest for another.

Wisely she wished to know no more. Time must work out its own problem.

Still it was delightful to think of her own two sitting together in the cosy boudoir, and of Joseph's strict orders to exclude all others; and feeling that such a state of things could not be improved upon, the service, even with a christening in addition, seemed all too short, and the rector and his sister were favored with her ladyship's company for a good half-hour after its conclusion.

So long indeed did she linger, that the swift approaching darkness, rendering an escort advisable, obliged Mr. Stoneby to offer his own. He was not sorry, thinking he should see Hartland; but Hartland was nowhere about, and though Lady Julia made sure of finding him with his cousin, she was told he had been gone from the boudoir some time previously. Rosamund looked fatigued and pale, and her aunt felt sure she had been in tears, and that more had passed than she was to hear of. This was a little, just a little hard to bear, and almost any one else, even the kindest and tenderest of nurses, would have pressed for a confidence, or, at any rate, have sought to beguile one.

Not so Lady Julia. With a loving tact which only the purest unselfishness could have prompted, she seemed to see and observe nothing, while she ran cheerfully on about the weather, the sermon, the collection, and the congregation, as if these subjects alone interested her.

Next she went down to dismiss her escort, and see him off the premises, with an instinct that he was not wanted at this crisis; and finally, dispatching the trusty Charlotte to attend to the patient, she did not even indulge herself by returning to the boudoir, but betook herself off to her own room, as was her habit at that hour.

There we will leave the kind soul, and see for ourselves the scene to her mortal vision denied.

Hartland, on being admitted to his cousin's presence, was inexpressibly startled at the change which a few days' illness had wrought in her. He had not realized that this change had begun some time before; that the fragile form now before him had been drooping and wasting for some weeks past, and that the strength had been by swift degrees also waning. Accustomed as he had been to seeing Rosamund almost daily, the gradual alteration had been invisible; it had been obliterated by the feverish flush upon her cheek, the fire in her eye, the agitated voice and restless movements—there had been a false brilliancy thrown over all—and it was not till he perceived her divested of all stimulus and every motive for effort and exertion, that he was convinced that Lady Julia's demonstrative anxiety had not been overdone.

At the first sight, indeed, he felt as if his aunt had scarce been anxious enough.

His step involuntarily slackened, and his accents grew tremulous as he drew near the large arm-chair in which the invalid reclined, and made the inquiry, "Are you better, Rosamund?"

"I think so, Hartland."

He sat down. "Tell me if I am in the way, you know."

"Oh yes, I'll tell you." She smiled, then flushed and paled, and a sense of embarrassment began to creep in. Was it to be an interview of ordinary commonplaces and small-talk, or one fraught with the deepest significance and purport? Each seemed to know that if nothing were now to be breathed of that which was causing alike each heart to beat, one would be as grievously discontented as the other: and yet, who was to speak? Who was to begin it?

"I hope you do not feel this room too warm," murmured she, at last.

"Oh no; it is very comfortable."

"Aunt Julia would have the fire made up before she left."

"She was quite right. We need large fires now"; and he shivered slightly, looked out of the window at the gathering mists, looked again at the brightly blazing fire, and finally looked at her. The last glance was hurried, and almost stealthy—and she knew it was so.

"What have you been doing since I have been up here?"

It seemed as if something must be said by one or other to prevent a blank, awkward silence; and, as usual, the woman was the quicker.

"Nothing that I know of—nothing at all, that I can think of."

"Have you seen anybody? Have you been anywhere?"

"I have not been anywhere, except to King's Common."

"Well?"

He was silent.

"I must say you are not a lively companion," observed poor Rosamund, at her wits' end; and, moreover, a little exasperated that all the task of taking the initiative should be laid upon her. "Come, think of something to say—something to tell me; and let it be amusing and interesting, if you please. Exert yourself for my entertainment. You were sent here to entertain me; and now, when—" then she suddenly met his eyes, and broke off.

He was looking her full in the face; and, struck afresh by her paleness, her feebleness, the dark rims round her eyes, the poor attempt at gayety—the whole so touching in its pitiful appeal—he could no longer repress evidence of the emotion with which his breast was charged.

"I see," said she, in an altered voice. "I see. You are sorry for me."

He nodded.

"If I thought I could speak about it, and—and—if you would have patience, and—be—a little kind," continued the speaker, her own breath beginning to come and go, "I should like to say something. Could you come a little nearer?—no, not so near as that," smiling, as he instantly placed a chair at her side; "now you frighten me. It is only that I—I am not very strong, and my voice goes away sometimes, so that I can not make people hear. There, that will do," as he moved a pace or two farther off. "Hartland, I dare say you can guess what it is that I want to say. I was very angry with you that night."

"So I saw, Rosamund."

"I want you, first of all, to forgive me."

"You mean you wish to forgive me, dear,"—the word slipped out, he did not know when he said it.

"I mean nothing of the kind," said Rosamund, firmly. "I mean that I know now that I was wrong, and that I knew it then—though my proud, miserable heart would not acknowledge it; and that it was right and true of you to speak as you did, if it was a little—a little hard to bear"; and her lips quivered. "I have been very wicked. I have been acting a cruel part; and I am frightened and ashamed when I look back upon it," continued she. "It was worse, worse than even you knew, Hartland. You don't know what a dreadful, dreadful temptation I had, and how I gave way to it when we two, Major Gilbert and I, were alone together; and I thought, I fancied no one would ever know how it had come about if we separated, nor whose fault it was. If you had seen how odious I sought to make myself! How I would repel his kindest advances, and refuse his most trifling requests—why need I go into it all? No other man would have borne it for an hour; and *you*—you would never have come near me again."

He murmured something, she could not catch what.

"*You knew nothing of this,*" she repeated mournfully.

"I saw enough to—to—" stammered he.

"I had fancied no one about me saw anything, till you spoke. Oh, how astonished I was! Well," after a pause,—“well, it is past. I have had time to think of it all”; she covered her face with her hands. “I have thought, and I have tried—to pray. God will help me now to do what is right. I think I see my way clear. I hope it is. I will try to love him—”

Hartland started.

“I will do my best to make up for all these weeks of unkindness, and he will learn to forget them,” continued the speaker, endeavoring to be calm. “And you, dear cousin, must learn to forget them too, and that you ever had to give me that evening’s warning. It ought to have opened my eyes. I think it did. Only I was so unhappy. But I am happier now—my mind is clearer. I wish to do my duty; and surely to be the wife of a kind, good man like Major Gilbert is no great punishment for all that I have been, and done. I deserve that my self-will and stubbornness should have brought a far, far greater one upon me. If I can only make up to him for all—be to him all that he thinks me—” here again voice failed.

“You mean this, Rosamund?” He spoke at last.

“Indeed I do, Hartland. I have thought it all out, as I have lain in there hour after hour, by night and by day,—you don’t know what long, sleepless nights I have had, hearing the hours chime one after another,—and even when I have been sleeping, I have had the one thought working in and out of my dreams, till sometimes I could scarcely bear any more. I shall see Frederick to-morrow, if—if I am well enough”—and again her faltering accents betrayed the effort,—“and when he comes, I shall beg him to overlook all my foolish petulance and coldness. I hope he will put it down to illness—I think he will. It would be best, because I could not explain—”

“Why not?” said Hartland, in a deep, abrupt tone.

“Tell him that I had—had—”

—"Ceased to care for him."

"For shame," said Rosamund indignantly; "you know that I could not do that. For his sake, I could not. If I did, it would be—it would be—oh, you know as well as I, what could be the only result of that. I must—yes, I must let the past alone; and in the future he shall have nothing to complain of."

"Can you do this, Rosamund?"

"I can": she clasped her hands—"I can."

"Your mind is quite made up?"

"Quite, quite; nothing can alter it now. I look upon myself already as Frederick's wife, and what I could have done then, I can now. I feel myself as much bound to him by what has passed between us, as if I wore the wedding-ring. Am I not right? You do—you must think I am. And as I knew that you have always liked Frederick, and have always done him justice, I felt that I wished myself to tell you this, because you had been vexed and pained with me on his account. You will never need to be vexed with me again, Hartland,"—and her voice was inexpressibly low and sad,—“believe me, I shall not vex you any more."

He laid his hand on hers, and felt that she was weeping.

The gathering dusk had settled over the little room, and hid the faces of its occupants; the blaze of fire-light had died down, and betrayed no secrets.

Silently the two sat for a few moments, thus.

She thought that he had accepted her promise, and that she had his approval,—he felt all further speech to be useless.

Neither spoke again, and presently he rose, and went softly out.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TRUTH.

"Truths that wake
To perish never."

—*Ode to Immortality.*

"And my soul, from out that shadow, that lies floating on the floor,
Shall be lifted—Nevermore!"

—E. A. POE.

"EVEN yet she is not willing to give it up? She actually intends to *go on* with those Gilberts even now?" cried Lady Julia in the utmost consternation, when time and pains had elicited at length as much from Hartland.

He was standing with his back to the speaker, leaning heavily against the mantel-piece in an ungracious, uncommunicative attitude; and as she watched him, all the little flutter of hope and expectancy until now half-unconsciously cherished sank and faded away.

It was by watching rather than by listening, that she gathered she had now nothing either to hope for or expect.

"My dear," she proceeded mournfully, "do bear with me for once, and—and look round and tell me all. Is Rosamund—do I understand that her mind is made up to *go on* with those Gilberts?" Rosamund's engagement had now, it will be seen, become in her aunt's eyes no longer a thing by itself, but was merely one portion of a fell scheme on the part of a marauding trio now occupied with their other prey, and who, if not prevented, would presently swallow up father and daughter alike. "They are such dreadful, dreadful people!" moaned she.

"There is not a word to be said against him!" exclaimed Hartland, almost fiercely. "Believe me, Aunt Julia, your best policy is to give up all this hostility and reconcile yourself to the inevitable. You will do Rosamund an infinitely greater service by cheerfully accepting the position; receiving Major Gilbert as her future husband; and, for her sake, overlooking whatever to you is not agreeable about him and his, than by seeking to dissuade her from doing what she believes to be her duty. You know Rosamund. She is more hard to move when she is calm and collected, than in the heat of battle. She is perfectly calm now, and what she says she will do. She may be right—I do not know. But this I am sure of—she is not to be moved. Therefore—" He paused, drew in a long breath, and dropped his head again upon his hands.

"She will have a bad night after this," reflected Lady Julia, relapsing into the patient's nurse. "And I had so hoped she was to be better, not worse, for the little change. I had thought that you might reason with her; and that if she could be once prevailed upon to put an end to this odious affair—"

—"For heaven's sake, ma'am, no more of that! Forgive me, Aunt Julia," said the young man, letting go his hold and coming toward her, "I am not fit to talk to you about it—that is the truth. But if I could only bring you to see that—that this sort of thing must be stopped, that these expressions are of no use—in short, that the marriage is as good as consummated now in Rosamund's mind—you would surely understand to talk differently. When a thing has simply *got to be*—"

"So you say, Hartland; but," replied Lady Julia with quiet persistence, "there is time yet. It can not possibly take place before some months have passed."

"It ought to take place at once."

Her jaw fell.

"My dear aunt," continued Hartland, more gently, "I know this is hard on you. Perhaps it is so on me too. I am not eager for the alliance. But what I said before, I repeat—that, for good or ill, Rosamund will now keep her word; and if you had seen her as I did this afternoon—feverish, hurried, tossed, and immovable—you would know that it is no kindness to prolong this state of suspense. Once the thing is done, I think she will be happier—God knows, I hope so."

"But you still think she does not love him?"

A spasm crossed his face.

"What do you think?"

Still no reply.

"Do you think she ever can, or ever will?"

With a sort of convulsion the answer came at last.

"No. God help her, *no!* No . . . no . . . no."

And a groan, which could no longer be suppressed, forced itself from between his clenched teeth as the last word died away.

Lady Julia fell back in her chair. For once in her life power of expression was denied her; and though she remained still and motionless where she was for a long time, only every now and again glancing uneasily round at her companion, she never once addressed him further, and they separated for the night without any attempt at reopening the conversation.

"Yes, she has had a bad night, as I feared she would, Dr. Makin," she announced to the little doctor, the following morning. "She was over-excited in the afternoon, talking and seeing people—"

"Major Gilbert was over, I suppose?"

"No, not Major Gilbert. No, he has not seen her yet. But—but others. And they talked, as young people do; and forgot that she was an invalid, and could not bear much. If I had been at home—but I was at church, at the afternoon service, and she came into the boudoir, and Lord Hartland joined her there," proceeded the simple lady, who invariably undid her

own infantile efforts at diplomacy the instant after they were made,—“Lord Hartland was with her all the time—”

“Ah !”

“And I found her quite tired out, when I came home.”

“That was a pity.”

“And she has been very much exhausted ever since.”

“No breakfast, eh ?”

“A cup of tea. Hardly anything besides.”

“Medicine suiting her ?”

“She will tell you that best herself. I think her head aches, but it may not have had anything to do with the medicine.”

“Probably it has, though. If a composing draught is not allowed to take effect, it is apt to produce headaches. Revenges itself, as it were. Well, we must have no more exciting conversations. Lord Hartland will please to remember that. And as he is not Major Gilbert—”

“She is determined to see Major Gilbert to-day, however,” said Lady Julia. “And I can not stop it, unless—unless you—” and she regarded her kind old friend and adviser wistfully.

“Suppose we go up and have a peep at our patient first, my lady. I will not let her see any one, nor do anything that is to harm her—you may be sure of that. If Major Gilbert is to prove as bad a companion as Lord Hartland,” smiling, “we must just close the gates, and pull up the drawbridge.” Saying which, he held open the door with his little air of old-fashioned courtesy, and followed his conductor up the staircase.

But his face was longer when he came down again. “She really is by no means so well as on Saturday,” he pronounced very gravely, directly he and Lady Julia were again alone in the drawing-room. “Pulse and temperature both unsatisfactory. No appetite,

and a good deal of fever. Color too bright. Restless eye. I do not understand all this nervous excitement"—then he raised his head, which had hung down as he ruminated, and cleared his throat with the look of a man who has taken a sudden resolution.

"Lady Julia, I am going to be very plain with you, and you must excuse my saying that I expect you to be equally plain with me. It is no possible good my coming and going and prescribing for my patient, unless I am put in full possession of all the facts of the case. I can not undertake to benefit your niece in the slightest degree, if anything, any mental disquietude, any undermining source of trouble, is kept back from me. That something of the kind exists, I can not help surmising. I feel nearly sure that there is something or other weighing on Miss Rosamund's mind, and counteracting all our care. If that be the case, I may as well discontinue my prescriptions, for they will do her no good. Unless we can strike at the real evil—"

—"Oh, if we could!"

To his surprise, Lady Julia made the above ejaculation with an amount of fervor for which he had been unprepared.

"Well, my lady," he began.

"Hush—sh—sh!" rejoined she, in a whisper so imperative and prolonged, that it seemed as if the echo of the final "sh!" would never die away; and then she looked round the large, many-windowed apartment, cautiously and fearfully. "These rooms are so very unsafe," she murmured. "It is almost impossible to be sure of not being overheard in a great room like this, with all these pillars, and stands, and statues. Is that door shut? No. But the sound could hardly have been carried so far. Still, would you oblige me by coming this way? The library is usually empty at this hour, and Hartland is out, I know, this morning. There we may speak freely; and I own, Dr. Makin, I do wish to speak freely."

must have a little unreserved conversation with you. Follow me, if you please." And she led the way to a smaller apartment, yet stately in its own fashion, lined with book-cases, and comfortably supplied with lounging-chairs, writing-tables, and light literature. A fire was burning brightly in the hearth, and its blaze was not the less welcome that the light from the large, mullioned window was partially obscured by a heavy folding screen drawn midway across, to keep out possible draughts. The softest of Turkey carpets completed the luxury of the whole, and rendered a footfall almost inaudible.

Lady Julia advanced nevertheless with a stealthy tread, as though conscious of being on an unusual errand ; and it was not until she had first seen that no Lord Hartland was in his usual chair by the fire, that she beckoned her companion to follow, and noiselessly slid the fastenings of the door after him.

That done, however, courage appeared to return, and in her wonted quick, energetic tones she plunged at once into the heart of the matter.

"Dr. Makin, you are right. Something is preying on Rosamund's mind ; and it is this most unhappy, most unfortunate engagement to Major Gilbert which is the cause of her illness. She—"

A look—what was it ? A gleam of horror and affright upon the face in front of her ! The eyeballs starting from her companion's head ! His lips falling apart ! His raised, warning, imploring hand ! What could it mean ? Upon what was his terrified gaze fixed, above and beyond her ?

Upon something, or—oh, heaven !—*some one* ? She turned. It was even so. She found herself confronted by Gilbert himself !

At the first sound of her voice, he had awakened from a musing fit in the window embrasure ; and although he had advanced on the instant, he had not been able to present himself, before he had distinctly caught every syllable uttered in Lady Julia's clearest,

most emphatic accents. His movements had not been able to keep pace with her rapidity ; and all could now perceive what had been done.

A frozen minute succeeded, grim to look back upon, terrible to experience.

Dr. Makin was the first to recover himself. "I will look in again this afternoon," he said hastily ; and the door opened and shut after him, leaving two motionless figures within, breathing silently in each other's faces.

"I heard something so strange just now," said Gilbert at last, speaking slowly, and looking steadily at his companion, "that if I had been in any other house, or if it had been said by any other speaker—"

Lady Julia sank down upon a seat, and covered her face with her hands.

"But you," continued the voice, which should have been familiar to her, and yet was one the like of which she had never heard before—"you, who have been ever a kind friend, a true woman ; you whom I respect and esteem, whom I have ever had cause to be grateful to ; you, who alone in this unfriendly neighborhood have shown me frank hospitality and kindness, have welcomed me to your family hearth—"

"Stop—stop." She put out her hands as though to deny his words, but he took no notice.

"You, I know, would not deceive me, would not resort to such a method—"

"Oh, no—believe me—indeed, indeed—" She wrung her hands in anguish unbearable : no moment of her life had ever been like this.

"And yet I hear you say such words, and say them, too, in such a way, that had they been uttered by any one else—by any man at least—I would have dashed the lie from his lips," proceeded the speaker, with a calm that was far more appalling than tempest. "I hear you tell another, and him no subject for a jest—I hear you make an announcement to him that is so—so strange—that concerns me so nearly, that I can

only bid myself to remember you were once my friend, and ask if you were not dreaming—not wandering—when you thus spoke?”

She shook her head. She durst not look at him.

“*Not?*” said he. He paused, and watched her for a few seconds.

“Have you any right—any authority, that you thus dare to make a statement which—” He paused again.

Still no word, no sound emanated from the bowed form at his side.

“Lady Julia, I am entitled to a reply.”

“If Hartland were only here?” moaned she at length.

“Lord Hartland!”

“He knows that it is the truth, only the truth; but oh! that you should have heard it thus!”

“If it be the truth, what matters how it is heard? But let me understand you, Lady Julia, and, I beseech you, no trifling. This is life and death to some of us. You spoke of this ‘most unhappy, most unfortunate engagement.’ To whom is it unhappy and unfortunate?”

She winced visibly.

“I have a right to know,” he said. He did not move from where he had taken up his stand by a hair’s breadth, and the very muscles of his face were rigid.

“It is her I have to think of—my only sister’s own child,” whimpered the frightened, timid woman at last.

“Oh, Major Gilbert, you do not know what Rosamund is to me. If she has made a mistake, and has not acted toward you quite as she ought to have done, let me put in one word for the poor child, the poor darling, too young to know better, not able to run alone, and so bitterly, bitterly punished.”

—“Punished!” The word escaped him.

Lady Julia echoed it.

“Punished indeed. Oh, she has suffered—no one knows how she has suffered. Could you not see it? Will you not believe it?”

"When you can explain your meaning, Lady Julia,"—but in spite of the assumed firmness, he was shaken.

"It was a mistake from the very first," she almost whispered. "You know how closely those poor children had been kept; and, as a matter of fact, you were the very first person who had ever been bold enough to pay my poor Rosamund any attention,—lovely as she was, she had scarcely been seen, and she had never seen any one—hardly any one, in return. She admired you—you became a sort of hero in her eyes—indeed in all our eyes, for your noble, your courageous conduct,—and then she thought, she fancied,—in fact, she mistook that feeling for another. My poor sister saw this, and would have saved her; but unhappily her interference roused all Rosamund's generous nature. She would not hear the absent attacked. She supposed then that she cared for you,—but she did not know herself. She did not know what she was doing. Major Gilbert, will you, can you, have pity on my child? She is so young. And oh, forgive her. She is so miserable."

He had not, by word or sign, attempted to stem the current of her words. He had hearkened attentively, drawing long breaths, but without movement or exclamation; and she felt that if she could only move him, reach him, break through this terrible self-control, it would be worth all the risk and effort.

She began to plead afresh. "What I only saw the other day," she said, "there was one of us saw long ago—"

—"Who?"—like a bolt from a cannon-mouth.

"Hartland warned me it was so—"

"Hartland did, did he?" There was rising passion in the tone. "This is Hartland's doing, is it? He saw—he whispered—he sympathized—perhaps he even suggested,—oh, I think I see the light now. A peeress?—A coronet?—she would have been an angel if she had not been tempted. And yet I could have

trusted Rosamund," softening—"I could have believed in Rosamund—"

"Believe in her still. Oh, no, she has not been tempted; and he has never tried to tempt her. Would it had been so!" sighed Lady Julia, unable to resist the aspiration. "It was what we all wished—"

"And he has been in league with you?"

"He has not—he never would. Oh, long ago, long ago, if they could have—have cared for each other, we should have been so pleased, so glad,—but it was not to be. No, Major Gilbert, you are altogether wrong about Lord Hartland," with a fragile attempt at dignity; "there never was anything between them—never."

"Why, so I thought," said Gilbert gloomily. "But what the devil—your pardon, Lady Julia, but what, then, is a fellow to suppose? You tell me he was the first to—to perceive this alteration in my future wife, and what am I to understand from that, but that he had a special motive for such discernment? I suppose Rosamund has confided in you?" he added abruptly.

"No, I can not say that she exactly has."

"Not sought advice, nor besought your intercessory good offices—that sort of thing?" scornfully.

"Never, by a single word," averred Lady Julia, with the utmost solemnity, and not perceiving the extent of such an admission.

"Not!" exclaimed he: his surprise was evidently great, and was followed by a look of doubt and perplexity. "But I thought—I thought—you came straight from Rosamund's room; I never doubted but that you had her warrant—"

"I had nothing of the kind. She and I have never let one word upon the subject pass between us."

"More and more strange," muttered Gilbert, but the cloud upon his brow obviously lifted. "You must allow me to observe then, Lady Julia, that you were hardly justified—though what matters it?" he suddenly cried, with a reaction to joy and relief alike

touching and frightful to behold. "My dear lady, I excuse you; I know you mean well; but I believe, from my soul, you are in error. You have been misled by this illness. You have been upset, and have hit upon a false scent. You have not been all day, and every day, with your niece, as I have of late; and seen this coming on—the result of grief, a shock, a nervous depression all at once. Your own medical man vouches for this attack being one of pure nervous depression. Take my word for it, you have been dwelling on it with exaggerated apprehensions, until they took this form. Possibly you had noticed, and misunderstood, some trifling irritability—Rosamund has been unable to help a little irritability of late—and you have connected this with your present fears. Oh, I was a fool, a madman to take for granted what I did. I will not so wrong her and myself again. Unworthy suspicions of Hartland too! But I scarce knew what I was saying. Let me now go up to Rosamund. I am impatient—can you wonder at it?—to put this misconception straight, although I promise you that I do not fear the result. No, I do not doubt her—not for a moment. She must never know that I once did—it would hurt her too much."

"Major Gilbert, I can not let you go up."

"Is she in a nunnery—is she locked up behind prison bars?" cried he, half angry, half jesting. "Come, Lady Julia, trust me. I will do Rosamund no harm. I am not a boy with no experience of sick-rooms; and I will be as tender as a woman with your charge. She shall not suffer through my seeing her,—but see her I must," he added, in a tone that none would have dared to trifle with. "This is too serious a matter—I had almost said an accusation—to be altogether dismissed; and your good doctor must not be left laboring under a delusion, neither. From Rosamund's own lips—"

—"She will not give you up," cried Lady Julia in an agony.

"I shall not ask her to give me up."

"Are you going to question her? Oh, Major Gilbert, it was the truth, the solemn truth, you heard from me—"

—"I hardly think it was."

"Oh dear, oh dear! I can not say more, I can not convince you—"

"If it be the truth, Lady Julia, Rosamund can convince me: one word from her—" and he moved toward the door.

"One moment—one moment. I know she will say she will marry you. If that is the question you mean to put to her—"

—"It is not the question."

* * * * *

"I have not come to torture you, my dear, nor to blame you. You have told me truly, as in the sight of Heaven, the one thing I cared to know, and why need I remain for more? You no longer love me. All is over between us."

The brave soldier knew the worst, and faced it thus.

"I should never, never have told you. Frederick, —God knows I meant to be—to be a good wife to you," faltered the pale, death-like lips before him. "I have been so miserable, so ashamed"—between heavy sobs—"and I had been going now to be so different. Let me try. Only let me try. Frederick, there is still time, and I can, I will,—if you will bear with me, if you will but have a little patience, and—trust me once again."

"Do you and myself a great wrong, Rosamund?"

"Oh no—not now. Not now that you know all. I ought to have told you myself, ought I not? They said so, but—but I was such a coward; and I thought, I fancied things might come round without that. You have forgiven me, haven't you? And you will let me try, won't you? None but ourselves need ever know, nor guess about—about to-day. Let it be so,

Frederick. Let it be between us two. You will help me to—"

—"Deceive the world? Is that my proud, pure, spotless Rosamund? Would she go with me before the altar with a lie in her mouth? Would she let me place a lie upon her finger? Give me her fair cheek to press a lie upon?"

"Oh no! Oh, not that!"

"No, not that. You could not do that, Rosamund. You could not carry it through, even if you were to try. Many a woman could—but not you. See now, you have broken down already, broken down at the very outset, and that so palpably that others have seen it, though I was blind. Do you really think that you could vow in the sight of heaven to love, honor, and obey me—"

—"But I would, I *would* do them all."

"Your will is strong," he said sadly, "but it has been beaten in the fight already. You do not love me—you could not—"

—"At least I could honor and obey."

"The words are nothing," said Gilbert, with a momentary impatience, "the spirit would not be there—it is dead already. Do not press me further, Rosamund; I am not a hasty man. You have no cause to fear that I shall ever reconsider this decision, or importune you further. Here we part, and part for ever. There is no ill-will between us." His chest heaved. "I think I shall always care for you," he said.

"Oh, stop! Oh, this is dreadful!"—she caught his hand.

He smiled drearily. "Not so dreadful as it might have been. Be thankful it has not come too late for both of us. If you should marry Hartland—"

—"Marry Hartland!" Her surprise was evident and genuine. He looked keenly at her. "It was a mere idea," he said; "I ought not to have given it utterance. Still, I am glad I did; glad to know—"

"Good heaven! you did not suspect me—or him—"

of such a thing?" cried Rosamund, in new agitation. "Yet what right have I"—with a fresh burst of tears—"to feel insulted by any suspicion? But, Hartland, what has *he* done?"

"I will tell you, Rosamund. Lady Julia let fall that he had been the first to penetrate the secret of your altered looks; and such quickness—"

"But it was on your account, Frederick, indeed it was. If you had heard how coldly, how harshly he spoke to me—if you had seen how little he seemed to care for *my* pain! He was kinder afterward; but even now,"—and her lip trembled afresh.

"Yes, I believe he has acted a fair and honorable part by me," said Gilbert, after a pause; "he—"

"—He has—he has."

"So be it. Bid him 'farewell' from me, and assure him of my—of every kind feeling. Tell Lady Julia I pray her to forgive anything I may have said unkind or disrespectful just now, when I was hardly master of myself. I shall see your father, and personally acquaint him with the truth. I will save you all I can. And now,"—he took her hand,—“and now, my one, my only love—the time is passing—and we may never meet again upon this earth,—say one kind word—give me one look—one kiss,”—she sobbed aloud, but there was no moisture in his eye,—“do not let it trouble you; but if you could say it,” he murmured, “let me have this one assurance to carry through life, that whatever may be the present state of your heart, you loved me *once*—you loved me that one, happy day?”

She tried to speak, but could not.

"Nay, then, I will not press it." He misinterpreted the evident struggle. "I see I was in a fool's paradise—"

"—No." The answer came in a hoarse, quivering whisper at last. "No. You were not. Not then. Not at that time."

"Was I not? You *did* care?" A gleam stole over his brow.

"I did. Believe me. I truly did."

"You did love me—or at least you thought so?"

"Yes ; indeed, yes."

"That, then, at least, is still my own. Thank God for that. I may dare to treasure that one remembrance—that broken spar from off the wreck. All the rest is gone—gone." He put his hands before his eyes for a moment, removed them, gazed long and earnestly upon her face, then turned to go.

"Farewell," he said, "farewell. I shall leave this neighborhood as soon as possible, and England likewise. You shall not be troubled with me. Farewell, Rosamund,"—he stood still for a moment, then, as if impelled by an irresistible agency, stepped to her side, lifted the moist tresses from her cheek, kissed it once again, raised his eyes, as though praying heaven to bless her as he did so—and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"JILTED! IT'S AN UGLY WORD."

"What signifies breaking some scores of solemn promises? All that's of no consequence, you know. To be sure, people will say that Miss didn't know her own mind, but never mind that. Or, perhaps, they may be ill-natured enough to hint that the gentleman grew tired of the lady; but don't let that fret you."—*The Rivals*.

"WHAT has happened? What has been going on here? What have you been doing?" cried Hartland, in burning accents, as he burst in upon his aunt a few minutes after. "Something has been done. I met a man going out—a man with a death-blow written on his face—as I came in just now. Speak! what has Gilbert heard? And who has told him?"

"Oh, my dear, it was not my fault. Do not look at me like that. I have done nothing—or, at least, I did not mean to do anything: but by the strangest, the most extraordinary mischance, he heard—"

"—He heard! Heard from whom?"

"I hardly yet know how it was. But it is done—"

"—Done? Yes. I should say so. But how? Quick—for heaven's sake, be quick, and tell me how."

"He was in the library, waiting, I suppose, for you. No one had told me he was there; or, indeed, that he had come over at all. I suppose he had not been shown into the drawing-room, because the doctor was there. Dr. Makin had just told me plainly that he could do our dear Rosamund no good, unless he were made acquainted with all her secret trouble—"

"—What did he know of Rosamund's secret trouble?"

"A medical eye, Hartland—"

"—Confound his medical eye! He has had the chance of hearing and seeing, and has put two and two together. So *he* informed Gilbert?"

"Indeed, no. It was *I* who was informing *him*—"

"—Him—Makin?"

"I had no choice. When a doctor insists upon it—"

"—And Gilbert overheard you? But—" He could not understand such overhearing. "I had always thought him the soul of honor," he muttered.

"It was not Major Gilbert's fault: he could not avoid it. Unluckily—though I can hardly say 'unluckily,' for we must be thankful—"

"—Well, ma'am, well? Wait a bit to be thankful. Be thankful at another time," cried Hartland, beside himself with anxiety, and the dread that anything had been done unworthy of their name. "You were in the act of telling Makin about the engagement—no doubt with all your comments and interpretations. May I ask if you had proceeded far? Had you mentioned names?"

"I had hardly said a dozen words; but, unfortunately, or rather—"

"—Oh, fortunately, or unfortunately—anything. He heard the fact?"

"Yes."

"How? In what words? Can you remember? Pray try to remember."

"I remember only too well; for during all that dreadful silence which followed the disclosure, I kept repeating them over and over in my mind, to make sure what it really was that he had heard—"

"—Well, what were they?"

"I told Dr. Makin that he had been right in supposing a trouble was weighing on Rosamund's mind, and that this trouble was her unhappy, unfortunate engagement to Major Gilbert. I had scarcely named his name, when I saw by Dr. Makin's face that something was wrong, and there stood Major Gilbert himself behind me! Just here," pointing to the spot.

"I have not left the room since. I have not dared to stir, for fear of meeting him again."

"How had he allowed you to proceed so far?" said Hartland, frowning.

"It was impossible for him to make known his presence sooner. He had to get out from behind the folds of the screen; and probably he had not realized the presence of any one, until after I had begun to speak. Even then, he would not suppose there could be anything very private in an opening sentence."

"True," said Hartland thoughtfully.

"No, he was not to blame," proceeded Lady Julia, who could afford to do her vanquished foe such justice. "It took but a few seconds for me to say what I did, and then—there he was."

"I suppose he was terribly shocked and—and overcome?"

"My dear Hartland, I was so frightened I could not look at him. But his voice—his tone—" She shuddered at the remembrance.

"Did he believe in it?—I mean, at once?"

"I think so—at first; and then again he did not. He hardly seemed to know how to take it. He was very quiet—very self-restrained; but every moment he seemed to me to increase in a kind of dreadful power so long as he stood over me, piercing me through and through with those great, hungry, raging eyes—"

"There—that will do!" cried Hartland, with a sickened look; "I know. I can see them. Good God! that a woman should have dared to inflict such anguish!" And he turned away, his own face working in strong emotion.

"He is gone now," whispered Lady Julia.

"Gone—and forever. I tell you he has left this house—our house—cursing it in his heart. He has been befooled and betrayed among us. Among us he has been led into a snare, that may be his ruin. What do you care? What do you think about the end of all

this? You women—you don't know how hard it goes with a man to be held up to pity among his comrades—to pity, and to ridicule; to being talked about, and laughed about, and told there are others, and instructed to forget, and bidden to begin again. Jilted! It's an ugly word. Can a man pardon it? I think, hardly. And he loved her—loved her, and trusted her. His faith in her was so perfect that it undid all her reckless attempts to undeceive him. He could not disbelieve. What it must have cost him to disbelieve at last!"

"I am afraid I have not thought enough of that," said poor Lady Julia, her better nature asserting itself. "Certainly I ought to remember how very sad and painful this must be for poor Major Gilbert."

"Sad and painful!" almost shouted Hartland; "I—I—better not speak of it, ma'am; I doubt if you know what pain is. I did, once. I don't like to think of that time. We need not discuss this further, I think: you had better go to Rosamund; and I, to—the devil," he muttered between his teeth, distracted by shame, and a dim and lurking sense of guilt.

Lady Julia, only too thankful to be released from a second interview, little less inferior in its terror to that which had preceded it, flew like the wind—or, to be more exact, panted up the broad staircase as fast as she could—to the boudoir, and scarcely waiting to have her tap at the door answered—for not to tap at such a time would have seemed ungenerous—she entered, and found her niece, not, as she had expected, excited, impatient, tearful, ready to be comforted and caressed, and at heart inexpressibly relieved—but in a state requiring immediate physical attention.

Pale as death, spent with weeping, unable to utter a sound or raise a limb, Rosamund half lay, half crouched among the cushions of the little settee, upon which she had sunk when Gilbert left her. A feeble moan; a raising of the heavy eyelids, which fell again *instantly*; and a nerveless, ineffectual effort to stretch

forth a hand which also dropped at once, were the only indications given of her being conscious that any one had entered.

She seemed as one in whom all powers of thought and feeling were for the time suspended, leaving only an agonized sense of utter weakness—as one so bruised, and crushed, and numb, that the very life itself was fast ebbing away.

Lady Julia stood still, her own heart turning cold at the sight.

All inquiry had been answered and expression checked by that mute, stricken figure, those swollen eyelids; even now as she looked, a watery thread trickled down the cheek, on the soft pillow beneath, and was left to dry itself.

"Not even strength to care about that," murmured the beholder. "I am well punished. I little thought that when I gave out she was so ill before, it was so soon to be the simple truth. This has half killed her. Oh, God, spare the child!" and with the cry she fell upon her hands and knees, and prayed as she had never prayed before.

And Rosamund was very ill.

Day and night succeeded each other, and week after week likewise, while she still lay on that bed of sickness, mind and body alike prostrate, knowing nothing, and caring for nothing, beyond what passed within the four walls around her, the dim workings of her overclouded brain never going beyond the little events of the sick-room's daily routine, and all the outer world a blank.

No one ever spoke hardly of Rosamund, even when her tale came to be told. It was felt that, however great might have been the mischief she had wrought and the wrong she had inflicted, she had nearly expiated all with her life.

Let us now return to others.

Gilbert on passing out into the raw, chilly air of that December morning, with all his dearest hopes blasted

and his future in ruins, was too much under the stimulus of strong excitement to give even a passing heed to anything beyond the exigencies of the immediate present. By the aid of this spur, he was enabled, without hesitation, to proceed upon what his clear, resolute mind decided must be done on the instant, and allowing himself no time either for doubt or repentance, he strode along toward King's Common at a pace which brought him there before it seemed that he had well started on his way.

Mr. Liscard was out—but the young ladies were at home. They were going in to luncheon.

Luncheon! A faint pang just made itself felt at the word. Luncheon is a cold and awkward meal, contrasting unfavorably with the cosy tea, or the glowing, genial dinner,—but it had suited his military arrangements to come over at that hour, and with it was connected as much or more than with anything else the dead past.

To go in now as before! To sit in the accustomed spot! To look round the accustomed room, and mark all the old arrangements and habits, and feel that he was seeing these for the last time, and that even now, even while there, it was another than the Frederick Gilbert who had been wont to fill that place, who was present at this time! And he himself—where was he?

Pulling himself together as well as he could, he looked at the footman who had answered his summons, wondering if aught amiss in his speech, or appearance, had been visible; and repeated the word "Luncheon?" as an excuse for taking a moment's time to think. Could he endure it, and go through with it?

"The gong has just sounded, sir."

"No one else is there, you say?"

"No one but the young ladies, sir," and the man stood aside with so evident an expectation, such an air of "It is all right. You are one of us. Pray be quick," that it was irresistible.

Loathsome as was the vision of food, and noise, and talk, and laughter, the ordeal must be gone through; and it began, as might have been foreseen, with the sisters' first sight of his face. They sprang forward.

"Frederick! What is wrong? What is the matter? Why do you look like that?"

He kissed them both.

"Now, look here," he said, taking a firm, determined grip of each one's hand—"look here. Listen. There *is* something wrong. There *is* something the matter. But I can't tell you what, till afterward; and do not say one word about it till I can. Don't remark upon me—nor take notice of anything—nor ask a question. We must come in now; and keep still before the servants. Now, remember," and he unlocked their hands, "You will know soon enough," he added, under his breath.

"One thing, brother, only one," implored Emily. "Rosamund? Is it about her?"

"Yes." His mouth shut as if it were a vice; and he turned on his heel, and walked through the open door into the dining-room, leaving them to follow.

"She must be worse, and the marriage is put off, I suppose," whispered the one to the other. "I know he has been there. He was to see her to-day. Poor Frederick, he seems regularly to feel it."

"And after all, it is no great matter; it is all very nice as it is," nodded back the other.

They saw that Frederick poured himself out a glass of wine, and suffered food to be placed before him, and made a feint of eating for as long as the servants remained in the room,—but it took little observation to perceive that no morsel in reality crossed his lips; and, as they further noted that from time to time he glanced impatiently at their plates, and then at the clock, they understood to hasten their own proceedings to a close.

"Are you ready?" he asked, perceiving this.

"Yes, brother," replied both simultaneously.

"That's well. We shall just do it," taking out his watch, and comparing it with the timepiece in front of him. "Yes, we have half an hour. I suppose they can bring a carriage round in half an hour."

"A carriage has been ordered for half-past two, as it is," said Henrietta. "We are going in to Longminster to fetch Mr. Liscard; and we were to start early, in order to have the whole afternoon before us."

"For Mr. Liscard is going to take us a long, delightful drive," added Emily, with animation, "through a part of the country we have never seen before."

"At what time did you say? When was there a carriage ordered?" demanded Gilbert, waving aside with a frown the superfluous communication. "At what o'clock?"

"At half-past two."

"That will do; but what carriage was it to be? It must hold four."

"The mail-phaeton, if the weather kept clear."

"It is clear," glancing out; "we must have the phaeton. But it must be punctually here at the time, or as soon as we can get it now," and he rang the bell.

"If we are not going for Mr. Liscard, brother," suggested Emily, "ought not some one to meet him and tell him so? He expects us, and will wait—"

—"The phaeton can go on after it drops you at the station; I will take it on myself."

"At the station?"

They had not anticipated this: they had severally conjectured, in the brief time given them for conjecture, that something was amiss at the Abbey, and that they had been sent for thither,—but they were altogether thrown out by this new revelation. They now glanced mutely at each other, while Gilbert, in curt, imperative tones, gave the orders; and on his next motioning them in silence toward the room they had quitted, he was obeyed with ever-growing uneasiness. His set face, the stern, forbidding air, so unlike the gay spirits which usually characterized their light-

hearted brother, brought an increasing conviction that they stood on the brink of a precipice from which he had already plunged.

"What are we now to do, Frederick?" inquired the elder, at last; "shall we—" and she looked for commands.

"Yes, you must get yourselves ready, and as quickly as you can. But wait—just a moment first"; he stopped, then began again, and was again unable to proceed.

"Look here," he said at last, in a strained, husky undertone; "it is of no use, I can't do it. I meant to tell you all, but I find I can't—yet. You must not mind. You must do as I bid you without knowing why, for the present. I think you would—you will, when you know what I—what we all have to bear."

"Yes, brother." And they came close to him at once.

He looked at one, and then at the other; but they knew that he hardly saw their faces—that he was lost in something different.

"This is what you have to do," he said presently. "I know it is hard upon you, but try not to mind. Go upstairs and put on your things for a journey. You are going home to-day. You are going by the three o'clock train."

Both uttered an ejaculation.

"You would not yourselves wish to stay, if you did but know," muttered Gilbert. "Now listen. You are going straight home, as I said. You will tell our father and mother that I am writing to explain why. I will write by this evening's post—"

—"But Frederick—"

"Well?"

"Our luggage. Our trunks can not be packed in the time."

"They must be sent after you. Leave word. Drop a pencil line to Catherine."

"But what are we to say? What reason are we to give?" The two doleful voices roused a sense of irritation in their listener, to whom it seemed as if they could have nothing to grieve for, and might have spared him.

"You have nothing to do with reasons," he replied sharply. "I will myself see Mr. Liscard, and give him the true one. But stay," he added, after a second's reflection; "for the look of the thing, tell Catherine that you were called home suddenly, and had no time to say 'Good-by.' By the way, where is she to-day?" suddenly missing her.

"Miss Penrose has a sort of examination, and gives prizes for the half-year, and I believe Catherine hoped to get one. She did not wish to miss it—"

"Well, well, never mind. It was lucky it happened so, that's all. Now, be quick, and"—here he once more looked fixedly at each,—“and be silent. Do not be overheard talking and conjecturing. Walls have ears.” And he flung himself into a new attitude, as though stung by a sudden recollection.

They took their departure.

"Emily, Emily, what is it? What can it be? Oh, Em, I am so sorry; it is too horrible. To be packed off like this, just when we were so happy, and were having such a delightful, delightful time! And Frederick seemed as pleased as we, only last night, and laughed at you about—you know whom. It is too bad. . . . I shall travel in my best hat—I shan't go away a dowdy from a place like this. . . . Oh dear, oh dear, to be going away at all!"

"It will make Mr. Liscard very angry," said Emily, sitting gloomily down to lace her boots. "I should not in the least wonder if he were to send after us, and bring us back. If only he had not been away from home to-day!"

"Do you really mean that?" cried Etta, brightening with the idea. "Why, then, we need not hurry about the luggage. Em, let us say nothing about it. Forget

it, you know. Then we could just slip quietly back again, as if nothing had happened."

"I think we must mention it. Frederick is sure to ask if we have, or not. Frederick never overlooks anything, and we must do what he says, Etta, whether we like it or not. But I can say,"—scribbling as fast as she could,—"I can say that it does not signify about sending it for a day or two, as we have plenty of things at home, and do not want to trouble any one. There, that will give us a little more time. And if it be as I suppose, that Rosamund is in for a long illness, and that people have been disagreeable, and telling Frederick that it is not nice for us to stay on here, and have made him declare in a huff that we shall go home, why, if he had only not been in such a hurry, we could soon have put things straight. Mr. Liscard would not have heard of our going. He needs us all the more if Rosamund is going to be ill, and stop on at the Abbey. And now that we have got Catherine, and have made all proper—"

"Only listen to that dear old sheep-bell!" cried Etta, running to the window, and opening it. "Oh, to think that perhaps we are never to hear it again! And I do love this view of the lovely park, with its great trees, and the deer, and the beautiful, broad avenue. I had got to feel quite at home here, hadn't you? And I am sure I had never thought I should. And I don't mind the men-servants a bit, now that I am used to them—nor all the grandeur. Oh, how happy we were only an hour ago, planning out every day this week, and—oh, Em, the Waterfields—what are we to do about the Waterfields?"

"We must leave cards to be sent," said Em profoundly. "Mr. Liscard will see to it, I am sure."

"You always think first of Mr. Liscard," observed her sister, with a smile. "I declare, Em, I wonder whether our going like this can possibly have anything to do with Mr. Liscard."

"Nonsense!" said Emily, who had already been

wondering the same thing. "But I am very sure he will be vexed about it," she added, "and I do think he ought to have been told. There—that's my brooch pin gone! I knew it was loose yesterday. And where *are* a pair of gloves? All our things are in such a muddle. I had meant to tidy them up only to-day. We never seemed to have a moment when we came in to put things by, and I do think Rosamund's maid might have helped us more than she has done." The truth being that Rosamund's maid had not helped at all. The pampered domestics of King's Common, accustomed to judge of every one by the standard of their late mistress, had speedily left the Miss Gilberts to shift for themselves, as soon as they found that their first formal tenders of assistance had been rejected. Young ladies who brought no maid, and dressed their own hair, could do anything.

"I dare say half our things won't come," quoth Henrietta now; "I don't at all like leaving them."

Emily felt as if she hardly cared whether they came or not; and the first stroke on the gong, telling of the carriage being round, struck on her ear as the knell of doom. They hurried down and found their brother in the hall. "Have you left any money?" he said, aside.

They had not thought of it.

"Here,"—he took some gold pieces from his purse. "Give these; you know best how. Look sharp."

"Brother? Sovereigns!"

"Give them, I say. No, stop, there is no time to lose. Give them to Badeley here, and ask him to see they go to the right persons."

She did so, and returned. Henrietta was already in the carriage.

"Get in, quick," said her brother impatiently, and was by her side on the instant, Etta having humbly taken the back seat.

"To the Abbey, sir?"

"To the station."

The sisters glanced at him. He bit his nether lip as he spoke. He was looking straight in front. His arms were folded.

There was something so stern, so hopeless in his air, a resolution so immovable in his countenance, that involuntarily they shrank and quailed before it.

He sat, an iron figure, with front of adamant, and eyes deep-set and burning beneath lowered brows, as one who neither sees nor hears aught of the passing scene; and beholding him thus, they themselves scarce durst move or breathe,—realizing more and more that they were in a presence all unknown before—the presence of an awful sorrow.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HARTLAND UNLIKE HIMSELF.

"O Love ! tormentor ! fiend !—whose influence, like the moon's, acting on men of dull souls, makes idiots of them, but meeting subtler spirits, urges sensibility to madness."—SHERIDAN.

WITHIN four-and-twenty hours after the events recorded in the last chapter had taken place, every busy tongue in and about the two great houses of the neighborhood was ringing with its own version of them.

Some facts were beyond dispute.

Rosamund Liscard was lying dangerously ill at the Abbey, and Major Gilbert's sisters had departed from King's Common in a mighty hurry ; but what was the connection between these, or whether there were any connection at all, was enough of a mystery to be delightful and provoking.

It was all very well for the young ladies to give out that they had been summoned home unexpectedly. Mr. Liscard's household could testify that no summons had come through any other medium than that of their brother the major (and the major had certainly been the person to spirit off the two), but neither he nor they had dropped a hint of bad news, sudden illness, accident, or any one of the usual causes of a hasty exit.

Of course the family might have chosen to keep their own counsel. There might have been ill tidings after all ; and if it had been so, and if, on hearing these, Miss Liscard had been taken worse, and her future sisters-in-law obliged to flee, nothing more

could be said. But the gossips shook their heads, and knew better.

No, no ; more than that lay beneath the surface. And the first idea that naturally presented itself was that Rosamund's papa had been brought to book for his late high misdemeanors. The old gentleman had been enjoying himself far too much, and the young lady had got wind of it. Probably, then, she had taxed her lover with his sisters' indiscretions, and he, in wrath, had swept them off to satisfy her.

His gloomy brow, the severity of his manner toward them, and their frightened, cowering obedience under it, were all attested to ; and the major, who was as popular as his sisters were the reverse, was allowed to have done the right thing—no second mistress being desired at King's Common.

The major, then, they concluded, did not choose to have his family talked about ; and as the members of it now under discussion had not known how to behave themselves, it had been "to the right about face" with them.

And to be sure, said one and all, it served the misses right, and the old gentleman too. Say he did intend to have another wife one of these days, no one would have gainsaid him, if only he had waited a reasonable time and chosen a reasonable lady.

Lady Caroline had not been beloved, and it would have seemed only a righteous retribution, had a successor to her been found at the expiration of a twelvemonth ; but the indecent haste with which the widower had suffered himself to be beguiled from his seclusion was one offense, and his having found a siren in Miss Emily Gilbert was another.

Miss Rosamund's lover was all very well : he was major of his regiment, and for the time being in command of it ; and the regiment was stationed hard by. Every now and then he might be seen riding out with his men, a gallant, handsome fellow, with a fine, authoritative air. He cut a dash in his tandem dog-

cart, kept a couple of smart grooms, and spent his money like a gentleman. To crown all, he had saved Billy Barley's life, at the risk of his own.

Altogether he had been regarded with complacency as a suitor even for Lady Caroline's daughter, and her ladyship had been stigmatized as haughty and arrogant, and quite beyond bearing with her airs and her pride, because she had not lent herself to the general sentiment.

But Major Gilbert was one person, and his younger sister was another.

For her was no accompaniment of military grandeur and beat of drum; for her no red-coated orderly would dash over with important dispatch or telegram; nor could she handle dexterously a pair of frisking thoroughbreds. To be sure, a French abigail and a silver-mounted dressing-case might have done something toward retrieving Emily's credit; but the sisters had been brought up plainly, and, wealthy as the family was, did not know what feminine luxury meant. It was their code that Frederick must have this and that—great, gilt monograms on his toilet accouterments, and a handsome fitting to his traveling-bag; but none of the girls whom they knew indulged in anything better than they had themselves, and they were content to be on the same level. Accordingly, although their outfit for the much talked-of-visit had been selected with care, and contained many new and expensive articles of dress, it was deficient in those trifling accompaniments which are the delight of ladies'-maids and housemaids. Neither embossed silver nor ivory, neither satin sachet nor embroidered shoe-bag, was there to be seen. "Not a bit o' lace nowhere," whispered one saucy minx to another behind-backs, "and only the meanest of edging! La! they ain't nothing."

All this was told downstairs, and downstairs told outside, and outside spread itself to right and to left; and the outcome of it all was, that Mr. Liscard was

felt to be lowering the standard of the whole establishment, by paying court to a lady who brushed her hair with a bone-handled brush.

To have had the popular voice with him, he should have selected the daughter of a noble house—or at least of an old county family—and have gone gradually and soberly to work. But instead, he had jumped up all of a sudden, like a jack-in-the-box, banged the proprieties about their ears, and gone for the first pretty, simpering pair of lips that said a civil word to him. Shame upon him, the silly old man !

There could be no doubt as to his vexation over the hasty finish put to his felicity.

He had come home from Longminster, apparently aware of what had happened ; indeed the groom attested to his having had a meeting with Major Gilbert in the town—and he had clearly been very much put out, indeed quite nonplused, by it. Miss Catherine's company at dinner had been declined ; and she had been further informed, in terms that had admitted of no discussion, that her presence for the rest of the evening could also be dispensed with. He had not himself gone into the drawing-room. He had retreated, as he had been wont to do of old when worsted in a fight, to his library and his books, and coffee had been served him there.

Presently the village doctor had joined him ; and the increased illness of Lady Julia's charge had been announced to Mrs. Ossory, and Mrs. Ossory had been requested to attend to divers directions, and had herself had a word with Dr. Makin, which had troubled the good soul not a little.

But, for all that, every one knew that Rosamund had not been the thought uppermost in her father's mind upon his return from Longminster, and that although her state might now be as alarming as was given out, he had not then known it to be so.

To himself, indeed, it is to be feared, the attached

parent almost went the length of allowing that his daughter's illness was opportune.

"It will stop people's tongues for a time," he reflected, "and save a vast amount of exposure and scandal. She has been a great fool. Gilbert would have made her an excellent husband; he has a good fortune, and the family is highly respectable. If she fancied him once, what possessed her not to go on fancying him? Is there any chance of patching up the affair, I wonder? No; for she has her mother's own temper. Besides which, he won't give her the chance. I never knew such a piece of folly in my life. All done in an hour! All made an end of, without giving one time to put in a word! If poor Caroline had been alive, neither of them would have dared to go up and down, backward and forward, like this. She, poor woman, always disliked the match, and tried to prevent it—but I knew the world better. I knew that Rosamund might have gone farther and fared worse. Besides, husbands are not rife in these days, and it does not do to pick and choose. It was nothing but Caroline's ridiculous fancy about Hartland that made her object, moreover. She could not see that Hartland is not a marrying man, or at least will not be a marrying man for many a long year. He will wait till he can lay hold of an heiress, and free himself from Julia's trammels" (to him Lady Julia's plan had never been confided)—"that's what Hartland will do. He is never dreaming of one of our girls. Rosamund had the sense to see as much, and take up with a good-looking fellow who could marry her off-hand, and be indebted to no one. Nice, bright girls those sisters of his, too. I was just beginning to feel a little more cheerful, and the house to be a little less doleful, and we might have got along very pleasantly as we were, if Rosamund had only held her tongue. Even if she did mean to cast him off in the long run, she need not have been in such a precious hurry about it. She might have

waited till she was better. She might have thought about me. But no; it is self, self, self all round. No one, not even my own daughter, thinks of me. And the upshot is, that here am I, stranded afresh, with no one to talk to, no one to have my dinner with, no music, no anything! Dr. Makin says Rosamund is ill. She may well be ill. She has made herself ill. Julia is no more good as a nurse and guardian than a potato-stalk. I should not wonder if the old goose were at the bottom of it all, either. I don't fancy she cared for Gilbert much more than Caroline did. Between them, they have made a mess of the whole business. All concluded without my sanction, without even any reference to me! I—I—upon my word, if this is going to be the way in future, I might almost—almost as well—” and he just stopped short of saying, “I might almost as well have Lady Caroline back again.”

“And is it really true what I hear, Mr. Stoneby?” inquired Mrs. Waterfield, on meeting the rector a few days afterward; “is the engagement really at an end?”

“I am afraid so,” said he. After all that he had seen, supplemented by all that he had been told, “afraid” was hardly the right word; but how seldom can one use the right word! It stands in the background, and a cat's-paw answers the purpose.

“Do you know anything about it?” pursued the lady, with the directness of the family friend.

“I believe that it was felt to have been entered into hastily, and it has come to as hasty a conclusion.”

“It is on her side that it is broken off, of course?”

“On hers, yes.”

“I thought not on his. I never saw a man more in love, in my life, than he was beforehand. I have not seen them together since. But I could fancy that, on closer acquaintance, he would not altogether suit the family. And Rosamund is capricious.”

“*She has felt it deeply.*”

"So she ought, Mr. Stoneby."

"Oh—yes—of course."

"She has jilted him, you know, explain it as you will," said Mrs. Waterfield, who was on easy terms with her clergyman; "that is the plain English word."

"I know," said Jack quietly.

"Her illness is really the best thing for her reputation, poor child," continued Mrs. Waterfield, softening. "It has been an unfortunate affair; and I thought Lady Caroline,—but, to be sure, Lady Caroline knew nothing about her children. Rosamund was an unknown personage to her mother—I always said so. Lady Caroline used to hint that I had my girls too much about me, made too much of them as companions, and gave them too much liberty; but one thing I know, no daughter of mine would ever get as intimate with any acquaintance as Rosamund Liscard did with Major Gilbert, without my knowledge and permission. Why, Lady Caroline's head was in the clouds, while he was paying her child the most open attentions beneath her very nose! Then, when she did at last become aware of what every one else in the neighborhood had known ages before, she thought she had nothing to do but to put her foot down on the affair to extinguish it! She was, of all the women I ever knew, the most injudicious," concluded the speaker, with intense conviction.

"I think she was, Mrs. Waterfield; and her daughter now suffers for it."

"And what does the father say?"

"He is considerably put out," said Jack, with a faint twinkle in his eye.

"Put out, is he?" and the lady noted the twinkle, and responded to it. "Put out? Not distressed, nor anxious, nor—"

"Mrs. Waterfield, you know Mr. Liscard."

"Very well indeed, Mr. Stoneby. That is, I thought I did once; but I am told—people do say that there is a new Mr. Liscard beginning to rise out of the ashes

of the old one, and with *him* I am certainly unacquainted. If this upset of the family arrangements has put an end to the novel order of things at King's Common, no wonder he is 'put out.'"

"You mean his driving the Miss Gilberts about?"

"And playing his flute to them—and—and other things."

"They are bright, talkative, musical girls, you see, Mrs. Waterfield."

"I never saw them but the once," responded she, dryly. "Talkative they were—the rest I must take on credit."

"At any rate, they are gone now."

"And gone in a hurry, I hear. Now, Mr. Stoneby, I respect your reticence, and you are quite right not to tell me more than I have heard already,—but do not expect me to suppose that you, Lord Hartland's intimate friend, do not know a great deal more of this matter than you choose to discuss. I dare say I ought not to be inquisitive, but"—with a smile—"can a woman help it? And I do love Rosamund," added the speaker, who was warm-hearted after a fashion, "and I am truly grieved she is ill, and truly rejoice that she is well out of her engagement to Major Gilbert. I wonder now whether I ought to leave a card and inquiry at the Abbey? Perhaps Julia would as soon I did not; perhaps she would rather not be troubled with me just now. And living four miles off, we need not be supposed to know just yet. Still,"—and she looked at Jack for inspiration.

He had none to offer.

"I dare say I should best show my good-will and affection by staying away, the case being so very peculiar," concluded Mrs. Waterfield. "If I am to do to others as I would that they should do to me, I shall certainly not go near the place. What do you think?"

He thought he wished he could do the like himself. *If he could only have reflected as comfortably that he*

also might show his affection and good-will best by staying away, how thankful he would have been !

He had not once met nor spoken to Hartland since their last never-to-be-forgotten interview. They had avoided each other by tacit, mutual consent, and were alike aware of having done so. It was Clementina who had been sent for to hear in confidence from Lady Julia of Major Gilbert's dismissal and Rosamund's increased illness,—and at first her brother had understood that he was to take no notice, and pursue his way as though nothing had happened.

But the confidence was now four days old, and he felt that as rector of the parish, being within half a mile of the Abbey, he could not with decency absent himself longer for the sake of appearances. He need not ask to be admitted. An inquiry at the door would serve all purposes ; and should Lord Hartland see him, and wish to avoid him, he himself would make escape for any one easy, by looking neither to right nor to left either on his way thither or on his return.

"If I had any plausible pretext for not coming," muttered Jack, as with leaden foot he slowly moved up to the front door, "I should never have set a foot within the precincts. I hate seeming to push forward, and be the first to hear the news, and all that sort of thing. Evidently Hartland does not wish to see me—"

"Come along," said Hartland's voice behind him, "come along. I thought you would be up to-day. Come in. I am at home, if no one else is."

"I did not expect to see any one."

"You will not—excepting me."

"Lady Julia is engaged, I suppose ?"

"She is in—my cousin's room."

"And how—tell me truly, Hartland—how is she ?" At once he saw that he was to be allowed to speak, to inquire, and to be frank.

"She is almost as ill as she can be," said Hartland.

"And you can say it so? Are you serious? You can not be serious. Can you possibly say that, and—"

"I feel as if I could say anything."

His friend glanced at him. "I think you are ill too," he said.

"I am not. I wish I were."

"You are very unlike yourself, and no wonder. After all you have gone through—"

"All *I* have gone through! For heaven's sake, let us have none of that!" cried Hartland, with a harsh laugh. "Your pardon, Jack; but don't you let me hear you say that again. *I* have 'gone through' nothing. *I* have not been dissected for a woman's amusement, and made a sport of for her vanity. *I* have not—"

"No, to be sure; no, I was wrong; my dear old fellow," said Stoneby, beginning to perceive what he had to do,—*"my dear Hartland, you are quite right. But you are not going to say things now, for which you will be sorry presently—"*

—"Why not? Why should I not say them? We have all taken leave to say anything up here nowadays, don't you know? Rosamund says one thing one day, and another the next. She—"

—"You tell me she is very ill," said Stoneby, slipping his arm through his friend's. "When people are ill, you know, Hartland, one must be patient and gentle with them. You would not be unkind to—to your cousin—"

"Oh, no—oh dear, no—not for worlds. That is *her* privilege. She—"

"Hartland, this is unmanly and cowardly. You would not further bruise a crushed leaf—"

—"Bah! Don't preach, Jack."

Stoneby was silent. He was not offended, but he was startled, inexpressibly startled: he perceived more and more clearly, by every word uttered, that the speaker was saying that for which he was at the *moment scarcely* accountable, that his mental condi-

tion was unhinged and overwrought, and that he was in no fit state to be argued with, or irritated even by a calm dissent. More, he ought not to be trusted by himself. At such a crisis, tact, patience, and infinite sympathy were imperative, and here had he been grudging, or at all event withholding, all three. His hanging back during the last four days seemed now the height of selfishness; and reflecting that during that time, a time when sympathy and beguilement had been most needed, his friend had been bereft even of Lady Julia to talk to—for she had been almost wholly engrossed by the sick-room—he could only be thankful that at least he had not suffered himself to delay another day.

“If I am not to be allowed to speak,” proceeded Hartland sullenly—

“Speak as much as ever you will—as much as ever you please—only let us be alone and unheard,” whispered Stoneby, for they were now crossing the hall. “But you are excited, and your voice travels farther than you are aware of,” in an undertone. “Why should we go there?” as his host turned the handle of the drawing-room door; “that is too public a place, is it not? Can’t we go and sit in the library—”

“The library!” echoed Hartland, starting back with an oath. “The library! Don’t you know what happened there? Don’t you know a specter haunts the place? I tell you that if I went in now, I should see him standing before me—she told me where he stood, and how he looked—and, O God! what he heard! She will tell you too, if you ask her. Women can tell anything. She thought it must have been very ‘sad and painful’ for him! She was really ‘very sorry about it.’ Faugh! She would have said the same if he had cut his little finger. Oh, that it should have come about thus! That no one had even the face to go openly to the poor wretch, and say, ‘There, take that,’ and strike him down in front! That it should have been dribbled out through the

leaking of a careless tongue! Let fall as a bit of news! Something dropped by the way! Yes,—come along, come along, and we'll go somewhere else and be alone, but not"—pushing roughly past—"not in by that door."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"PROMISE THAT YOU WILL BUT WAIT."

"Above thy head, through rifted clouds, there shines
A glorious star. Be patient. Trust thy star."

—*The Spanish Student.*

A FEW hours later on the same day saw Mr. Stoneby seeking admission at Major Gilbert's quarters at Longminster. He was admitted, although he could perceive that Gilbert came forward with an effort, that he was hurried and nervous, and evidently received with reluctance a visitor whom it was impossible to avoid.

For this, however, Jack had been prepared, well aware that the sight of any one connected either with the Abbey or King's Common could be no agreeable one to the unfortunate soldier, and he resolved to lose no time in extenuation of a visit so untimely.

"You are busy?" he began, glancing round.

"Packing up," said Gilbert succinctly. "I am going on leave."

"So I see. I ought not to have intruded at such a late hour, but I trust—I am sure that you will pardon me when I am able to explain my business—"

"Oh, certainly. Sit down, Mr. Stoneby," and there was another obvious effort to be disengaged and courteous. "You won't mind if I go on with my work," emptying a drawer which stood open. "I always see to these things myself; and as I have given up the rooms—" he stopped and pretended to have lost an article, for the admission was inadvertent, and might have caused surprise.

"When you want a thing done, do it yourself, is

your motto? I followed it to-night when I came here," said his visitor, with a faint smile. "The fact is, Major Gilbert, I am anxious about a parishioner of mine, who is in great trouble—"

"In trouble, is he? Poor devil! What is it? A broken leg? Rent to pay? Or what?"

"No. His trouble is not of that sort."

"It is of a sort that a fiver or a tenner will heal, anyway?"

"I am afraid not."

"Not, indeed?"

"It is not money he is in need of."

"Amazing! I thought it was always money a poor man was in need of."

"But my parishioner is not a poor man."

"Eh? oh! . . . It is not one of my fellows who has been getting into mischief over there, is it?" said Gilbert sharply. "And you are come to beg him off? I hope not. I—"

"No, you are wrong again. And your time is too valuable to be spent in guessing riddles. It is on Lord Hartland's account I am come."

At the name Gilbert's face changed, and his color rose.

"Oh," he said shortly, "I thought you said 'a parishioner'? Well, he is that, of course, but it misled me. But are you sure that you have any message from Lord Hartland to me? I think there must be some mistake. I hardly think he would send one," with an emphasis that was instantly intelligible. "Had Lord Hartland had anything to say, surely he would have come in his own person to say it."

"He did not send me, nor does he know I am come here; but I have sufficient trust in your generosity to feel confident that you would have blamed me had I hung back."

Gilbert inclined his head; he had ceased to touch a thing from the moment Hartland's name had been pronounced.

"It would be useless for me to affect ignorance of what has happened this week," said the young clergyman quietly. "I know, of course, all. I have come straight from the Abbey, Major Gilbert. Lord Hartland is nearly beside himself with grief and indignation and the most vehement remorse—"

"Remorse!" said Gilbert, starting. "Remorse, did you say? But"—and he regarded the speaker with keenly searching eyes—"but I was not aware that Lord Hartland had any cause for remorse," he added slowly.

"On my word as a Christian gentleman, he has none," said his companion, raising his hand to enforce the asseveration, "but he thinks he has. He thinks that what took place might have been prevented if he—"

"Absurd," said Gilbert. "I am obliged to him, but as if anything he could have said or done could have influenced my affairs! My affairs are my own—"

"Hear me out. You are on the wrong track. Hartland does not presume to think he could have done or undone any of this—this—what I mean, what really preys on his mind is that you should have been—that she should have allowed you—"

"No need to mention her," said Gilbert sternly.

"The fact is," said poor Stoneby, who began to perceive how difficult his task was likely to prove, and who had as yet got no nearer his real object,— "the fact is, that she is so seriously ill, his anxiety for her has completely unhinged him—"

"Anxiety for her! I begin to understand. And this 'vehement remorse' too! But I was told—Rosamund herself told me,—no, she did not tell me, but her aunt did, and she endorsed it,—that Hartland was nothing to her. I was solemnly assured—"

"He is nothing to her—but—but she is all the world to him."

Gilbert fell back, and his hand dropped by his side.

"Yes, Major Gilbert, that is it; that is God's truth about Hartland. His cousin knows it not—no one knows it but myself—but it is so. He has buried his secret in his own breast."

"Then, Mr. Stoneby, kindly tell me this. What is the remorse for? And with what does your friend reproach himself?" demanded Gilbert, folding his arms, and leaning across a small table, while he fixed his eyes, burning like coals of fire, upon his companion. "Surely he had as good a right as I to enter the lists? The lists were free to all."

"I am afraid," said Stoneby reluctantly, "that it was not until after you—"

"Ha! I see. But still, unless he played me false—"

"That he did not."

"Then what, in the name of heaven, does he reproach himself for?"

"He thinks he had no right to love her."

"That is folly. He had a right to love as much as he chose, so long as— Can you swear that he never gave her any reason to suppose it? That he never sought to undermine me? Never tempted her away from me? Never let her know that a coronet awaited her acceptance—"

—"Never,—before heaven I swear it, Major Gilbert,—never!"

"How do you know, Mr. Stoneby?" said Gilbert contemptuously. "Was Hartland likely to tell you? You are his father confessor, I dare say; but people do keep back little things, trifles, even at confession, they say; and a man in love—" he stopped.

"Shall I tell you how I know?" said Stoneby, rising and standing before him. "When a man talks of himself and of you as Hartland has done to me this day,—when he refuses even to look upon the place whereon you stood that morning,—when he almost curses the two women, whom he loves best in the world, for what they have done,—and curses him—"

self again for that which he has *not* done,—do you think that such a man, at such a time, would cheat me with a lie ? ”

“ You mean that he is unnerved,” said Gilbert, but it was evident that he was more struck than he chose to own. “ I should not have supposed Lord Hartland would have been so easily shaken. And if it be as you say, that he has nothing on his conscience, he can surely afford to—”

“ A man who *had* had something on his conscience would not, I think, have been half so deeply moved,” replied Stoneby. “ No one capable of playing another false, would view the idea with the horror Hartland does. You smile ? Major Gilbert, I know and love Lord Hartland as a brother. I could answer for him as I could for no other living man. It is because he is so upright, honorable—”

“ Spare me the recital of his virtues,” said Gilbert dryly. “ I have a regard for Lord Hartland, and I am glad to find his conduct does not necessitate its withdrawal, since,”—and he passed his hand across his brow,—“ since I am willing to take your word that it is so. But an eulogium on a rival is hardly—if you will excuse my saying so—is not quite in taste at the present moment. You say he loves his cousin,”—he turned away his head—“ in time she will love him too,” he added, to himself.

Stoneby was silenced.

“ You said something about some one being ill,” continued Gilbert, returning to his papers, and affecting to recommence arranging them; “ it is not serious, not dangerous, I hope ? ”

“ It is very serious. Until yesterday evening, I believe, it was thought dangerous.”

“ Who is with her ? Who attends her ? Not only that—”

“ A consulting physician came down from London yesterday, and he will see her again to-morrow.”

“ Is it as bad as that ? ” said Gilbert, in a lowered

tone. "I had not heard. I—to be sure I did hear she had been worse, but I thought, I fancied it was as it had been before, made more of than the reality warranted."

"At any rate there is no exaggeration now," said Mr. Stoneby in answer to the bitter smile which accompanied the words; and by which he could perceive that the cause of the exaggeration had been now divined. "They hope the most critical period is past, but a relapse would be most certainly fatal."

"Is it brain fever—or what?"

"Of that nature."

"I am going abroad," said Gilbert, after a pause. "I start to-night. But my sisters are—here is their address," writing it hastily down. "I should be grateful if you would send me a single line now and again, which they could forward. I am ashamed to trouble you—"

—"Trouble!" said Jack Stoneby, with emotion. "Major Gilbert, I have not dared—I do not dare to intrude upon your sorrow, but—" and he held out his hand with a look that supplied the rest.

"Thanks," said the soldier briefly.

The two men faced each other for a moment as their hands met, but Gilbert did not then know that here was another bond to him by that same secret link wherewith Hartland had been. "May I hope to be pardoned coming to-night?" said Jack, very humbly. It was hardly night, but the darkness of December at six o'clock made the term seem appropriate.

"Certainly. I respect a man who does what he conceives to be his duty. Even though I do not quite understand your object, I allow, Mr. Stoneby."

"I hoped for a word—a message of confidence—something to enable my friend to take a less distorted view of his own conduct. If he goes on brooding over every unhappy circumstance, and encouraging his own morbid fancies, I can not answer for the consequences. He is in a strange state, and my mind

misgave me when I left him just now. Major Gilbert, if anything were to happen to Lord Hartland, you would never forgive yourself if you had refused to send what I now ask for—a single kind, forgiving, believing word."

Gilbert winced, and drew his brows together. "A kind word is easily spoken," he said, "and I forgive him, as I hope to be forgiven; but"—and he moved uneasily—"it is hard to be called upon to place implicit faith in a friend who—who is more fortunate than yourself."

"It *is* hard. God bless you for trying to do it. It is so hard, that if I did not myself believe heart and soul in Hartland's honor, I could never ask it of you. But I know him better than he knows himself. I know what it will be to him to have to lie under this stigma in your eyes—"

"—“Does he expect to marry her?” said Gilbert, abruptly.

"He says he will never ask her."

"But you think—?"

"—“I think that unless you say something now to clear him in his own sight, he will hold to his resolution.”"

"I am to acquit Lord Hartland in order to leave him free to do the thing whereof he is acquitted?"

"You are to free him from a state of unreal misery and self-deception, because you are a just man," said Stoneby steadily. "You are to lift a burden off his back, because it has no right to be there. No one but you can perform this labor of love, and as God's minister, I call on you to do it. I tell you that Lord Hartland is suffering from an overstrained sense of his share in your wrongs. His share! *No* share in that wrong accrues to him any more than it does—to me," suddenly added the young man, a blaze of light upon his pale countenance. "Look here, Major Gilbert—you must, you shall be convinced by me when I tell you that I too love Rosamund Liscard."

I loved her before you did—before Hartland did—before, long, long before I knew it myself. I have never, by word or sign—all will bear me witness—I have never betrayed myself. Hartland never suspected it—you never suspected it. What then? Am I to afflict myself with cruel doubts and shame because of what I was powerless to prevent? Yet what has Hartland done, that I have not done? It is for my friend's sake I now yield up this secret; but I feel that knowing it, and acquitting me, as I know you must do, of every dishonorable thought, you can not in justice withhold the same acquittal from another."

"Don't you see, Stoneby," said Gilbert in a low voice, "that there is a difference? My poor fellow,"—and he went up and put a hand upon the speaker's shoulder,—“my poor fellow, you—and—I—are one. Hartland is not with us. He—” he stopped.

—“Yes?”

“We have no hope,” said Gilbert calmly. “He has . . . You are a good man,” proceeded he, after a long silence. “I believe in religion of this sort. It is, of course, rather strange and confusing to me to find another on the ground, and I must, as you say, allow you have never in any way given rise to suspicion of your feelings; but—well—I will try to think the same of Lord Hartland. I wish him no ill. Nay, since I must, I will endeavor to feel that I have no just cause to bear him a grudge; but I must say this: I hope—I do hope that, for his own sake, he will not marry Rosamund.”

Nothing had been gained by the visit.

The next point to be considered was, should Hartland know of it or not? His friend decided that unless point-blank questions were put to him, he would say nothing of the matter; and as it was most unlikely that he should be cross-examined, the step having *been an improbable one*, he had not much fear of *being unable to keep it to himself*.

As luck would have it, however, while yet little more than half-way home, the pedestrian was overtaken by one of the light dog-carts belonging to the Abbey, driven by Hartland's own particular groom,—and the man, recognizing the rector of the parish, at once drew rein. The night was dark and misty; Jack was tired and chilled. He reflected that whether or not he should accept the offer of a lift, the man's master would probably hear that it had been made, and where he had been met; and hunger and fatigue clamoring this view of the case into his ears, up he got, begging to be set down at a roadside cottage hard by the rectory gate—he did not care to run the risk of finding Lord Hartland sitting with his sister within his own four walls.

Diplomacy thrown away. He was in the act of dismounting, when he was hailed for the second time that day unexpectedly by Hartland's own voice.

Hartland was standing by a wayside pool, while his dog was dabbling among the weeds.

"I vacate to you," said Jack, as lightly as he could, and springing down almost before the eager horse could be brought to a standstill. "You'll get in, will you not? You are rather late for Lady Julia's dinner as it is."

"Is it dinner-time?" said Hartland dreamily.

It was long past, but neither was aware of it.

"I came down here for a walk," continued the speaker, in the same tone. "I have not had much of a walk to-day. There's nowhere to go. No, I shan't get in." (To the groom.)—"Go on home. I'll follow directly. I suppose I must," he sighed, under his breath.

"Come in with me," said his friend. "My dinner, such as it is, is no doubt ready, and—Wait a moment, Robert"—as the dog-cart was moving off—"if you will stop and dine with us, just send word, Hartland, won't you?" he added, judging Lady Julia's feelings by his own.

"Oh, I'll stop, of course," replied Hartland, in the same dreary accents. "I'm thankful to stop anywhere. Tell him so ; and I say, come along in, out of this beastly cold wind," shivering. "Take me in with you, Stoneby ; and I say, tell them to send a close carriage for me when they send. I hate this cold night air," he murmured plaintively.

There was no wind, and to Stoneby the night did not appear more chilly than usual ; but he understood. "Yes, let us go indoors sharp," he said.

He was now glad he had got his friend safe under his eye. Since his first appearance had provoked no comment, he feared nothing, and trusted to food and warmth and resolute cheerfulness while Clementina was by, and the unrestraint of affectionate intercourse subsequently, to doing what could be done in the way of soothing and cheering.

"You must take what you find," he said, stepping inside. "This may be mutton-chop day—and if so, you are lucky. Yesterday was mince day. I don't look upon mince day with equal favor, I confess. To-morrow is Sunday's beef—hot on Saturday, cold on Sunday, demolished on Sunday night. If we did not send it well round among the sick folks, we should not see the end of that beef till the middle of the week, so I hit upon the dodge—oh, here is my sister."

"How soon you are back !" cried she, running out into the hall at the sound of his voice. "Have you really been in and out of Longminster in the time—"

"Never mind, never mind. Here is something much more important. Here is Lord Hartland come to dinner. What have you got for dinner ?"

"Only mutton-chops," said Clementina, with a somewhat rueful visage. "I did not know exactly when you would be back from Longminster—"

"Longminster ?" echoed Hartland, as though struck by the second repetition of the name. "Longminster ?" And he looked from one to the other.

"Yes, I have just been in on—on business. It did

not take me long"; and the host hung up his hat, and began to take off his coat, as if the admission were nothing.

"But you did not say you were going, when you were with me. Did you mean then to go? We could have sent you over; we were sending anyway."

"Thanks. The walk was nothing."

"I would have walked with you—but no, I wouldn't. Longminster?" repeated the speaker suddenly. "What were you doing in Longminster to-day? What did you go for? Whom did you see?"

"I said—I—well, Hartland, I said I went on business, you know."

Vain effort. Hartland was now upon the scent, close and keen as a bloodhound, and his burning eye and twitching lip held out no hope of quitting it.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed impatiently. "What is the use of saying that? Business? Your business was with—"

"Yes—you are right—it was. Wait but one moment, till we are alone," whispered his friend. "One moment, dear Hartland. Come in here," opening the door of the little sitting-room, which was, as it happened, deep in shadow, though not shuttered in for the night. "What! no lights, no fire—"

"You can have both directly, brother, but we are to dine in the study, and it is all bright and comfortable in there. I had said we should not want the drawing-room to-night—" began the attentive little sister, but she was cut short ere she could explain domestic arrangements further.

"Never mind—it will do well enough," said Jack.

"But do come into the study," pursued Clementina, opening the door, from which instantly streamed forth brightness and warmth,—“see how comfortable it looks! Do, Lord Hartland, come in here. Here, Jack,” as no one moved to obey.

For the light was, truth to tell, undesired by either, and Hartland, to whom it was even an annoyance,

now made so peremptory and involuntary an advance into the less tempting chamber, that it was plain nothing could be done for him in the way of creature comfort. "Just like a man," murmured little Clemmy to herself; "when they are ill, or unhappy, they always will be uncomfortable, too. Jack is just the same—" and she had to respond to Jack's significant glance over his shoulder and nod in answer to it, and trot off to the kitchen to delay the cooking of the chops, and feel all the while that if she had been at the helm, and had had the management of Lord Hartland's affairs, she would have contrived infinitely better,—she would have seen to it that he had first of all a good dinner (though it were a plain one),—a good dinner, and a glass of good wine, and then his chair wheeled round to the fire, and some nice coffee or tea brought to him, over which he could confide his troubles comfortably,—instead of allowing him to turn in to that dismal drawing-room, with the blinds still up, and there, all tired and fasting as he was, plunge into an anxious interview. For she could see with half an eye what the interview was likely to be, and "Men are so stupid," concluded the little soul, shaking her head over them both.

But perhaps Jack was sometimes as wise as she.

He had heard that in his friend's voice, and seen that in his face, which told him that delay might be as dangerous as evasion was hopeless, and felt that all which now remained for him to do was to be as brief and as satisfactory as was possible. Alas! no real satisfaction was possible.

"Hartland," he began, however, "you are right, quite right, in what I perceive to be your conjecture. You suppose I went to see Gilbert? I did. And I saw him. He is on the eve of departure from Longminster. He goes to-morrow, and—"

—"Get on—get on. There is something more than *this*. You went to him for more than *this*. You went—?" and he looked the rest.

"I went because of what you told me just now. Forgive me if I should not have done so, but—"

"Oh, it's all right. I am glad, on the whole, you did. Do you know, I am glad you did. What did you say? What did he say? Did you—did he—? What does he think of me? But why need I ask?" he suddenly wheeled round. "What *can* he think? You need not be afraid to say. Speak out plainly. Oh, it will not hurt me; and what if he does? It is only what I ought to expect; of course he will abuse me—"

"He did not abuse you. On the contrary he—"

—"Well?"

"He was most moderate and calm. I never thought to have felt myself so constrained to admire—"

—"Ah! we know all that. That's the old thing over again. We are all constrained to admire,—and then—some of us break down. Now look here, Stoneby; I must know, and I will know exactly, what passed between you and Gilbert this afternoon. You can not refuse to tell me, and until I hear—" his haggard, expectant gaze supplied the rest.

"I will tell you all, Hartland."

"You fancied that Gilbert took it that he owed his dismissal to you," proceeded the speaker after a moment's pause, "and that in consequence he doubted your integrity—"

"Oh, doubted my integrity! My good fellow, say he thought me a blackguard. We want plain words now."

"I was able to give him my solemn assurance you were not."

"He did think it, then?" quickly.

"He had not known what to think. Evidently the idea had been presented to him, and had been dismissed. He had been twice told there was nothing between you and your cousin—"

"Who had told him?"

"Lady Julia and Miss Liscard herself."

"Had they? Had they? But how then? How—" his face fell heavily. "It is only on that understanding, is it, that I am to be exonerated? You had to assure them that there was nothing, and never would be any thing, between us? And Rosamund, had she done so too? Oh, I dare say he will forgive me, if he has her word for *that*? He—"

—"I don't think he had had her word for that. Indeed, from what he let fall, I gathered that he had had no one's word for anything of the kind. To tell the truth, Hartland, I fancy that he still fears, still looks upon you as a rival, and as a probably successful one in the future."

"Oh!" there was a perceptible alteration of tone.

"In which case, you can hardly wonder if he is a little difficult to convince just at present."

"He was difficult, was he?"

"Yes."

"Well? Go on."

"Gilbert has been accustomed to think for himself, and judge for himself; and though after a time he was willing to acknowledge in a form of words that he had no just cause to bear you a grudge, I own that I felt his heart scarcely went with his lips. He did not seem to understand, and perhaps he could hardly be expected to understand, how you could feel as you do without having direct cause for doing so. I had told him of your grief and—"

—"And shame," said Hartland emphatically. "I am ashamed; ashamed, and I care not who knows it. I feel as if we had all bitten the dust before this man. He is above us all, and may look down upon us all. It is that which cuts, Stoneby. If only we had played him fair—"

"Do you not see, Hartland, that you are taking on your shoulders a burden which—forgive my saying so—only belongs to another?"

"If you mean Rosamund," said Hartland, quickly, "I—I—not a word against Rosamund. The poor

girl is punished enough. You would not have her—you would not talk of her—I—I mean—let her alone.”

“So I will; but as you have identified yourself with—with her, and suffer accordingly, you can not wonder that Gilbert thinks your share in the wrong done him—”

—“I told you I had no share. Stoneby, I told you, before heaven, I was guiltless. You ought to have assured Gilbert of this. Why, good heavens!—did you allow him to think—”

Stoneby strove to be patient.

“No, Hartland, I allowed him to think nothing that was not true. But you had yourself made the task so difficult, that I was obliged to be content without accomplishing my chief end. I was forced to leave Gilbert to reconcile, as best he might, your feelings of a criminal with your protestations of being an innocent man. After all, what matter? He will do this some day. Some day, in time, when the first shock has passed away, he will be able to see more clearly, and to do you justice. My assurances will recur to his mind. He will remember those of others likewise, and his nobler nature will assert itself; the time will surely come when you will be as clear in his eyes as you are to those of all others.”

“If I am not,” said Hartland bitterly, “I will never, so help me Heaven—”

“Hartland, not another word. Rash vows are easily made, and hang like millstones round the neck thereafter. Say nothing—do nothing—for the present. Remember that one week ago you would have given the world to have had matters as they are now. Then be thankful; be patient; and wait.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LADY JULIA'S LITTLE PLAN.

"I delight in the tender passions, and would befriend all under their influence."—*The Duenna*.

A MELANCHOLY and dreary time now set in for all connected with those in whom we are interested, with one exception, and that exception was Miss Catherine Liscard.

Catherine, as we know, was a young person with a natural aptitude for turning events, whether of joy or sorrow to those around her, to her own advantage ; and she had early seen the strong points of the present situation.

In Lady Caroline's day, and in Rosamund's day, Catherine had been nowhere—a demure puss, creeping about in the background ; occasionally emitting sparks, it is true, which might have enlightened more watchful eyes, but which had been passed over by those two dominant spirits, each too much taken up with her own whims and projects, to give a moment to the supposition that a younger and feebler member of the family, could also have a mind of her own.

Catherine had bided her time.

On the death of her mother she had made some faint, wavering, and uncertain attempts at coming forward, making herself useful, and sliding into a more prominent position ; but Rosamund had been in no mood to allow of indulgences and encroachments at that time. Everything which had savored of a reflection on the old customs, and an overturning of the set routine, had been promptly quelled, and Catherine had at first made no way.

Then she had tried making friends with Gilbert, and been more successful. She had more than once taken him off her sister's hands, enabled Rosamund to slip away to solitude when only she could have done so, and established a claim on the latter's gratitude which had borne fruit. When she had been permitted to dine late on the night of Emily and Henrietta's arrival, the ice had been really broken.

All the rest had been easy. She had made a slip in looking ungenial on the first symptoms of a more jocose dinner-table than was usual—and that on the first occasion of her presiding over it—but the error was quickly retrieved; and although another momentary check had been received on the abrupt cessation of the frolicsome succeeding week, she had again found her opportunity in the reaction which had followed.

Dear papa could not dine alone—could not drive about alone—could not have a long, dull evening alone. She had so much enjoyed dear papa's music; and had practiced an accompaniment on purpose to please him, so surely now he would not refuse to hear it? What could dear papa do but agree, and listen to her carefully prepared chit-chat, and, in spite of himself, be drawn into ordering the phaeton round and bringing out the flute?

Certes, Catherine was better than nobody. And though one's own school-girl daughter is no great thing, and a poor exchange for a lively, bantering, roguish young lady visitor, still when the one is not to be had it is as well to put up with the other,—and by degrees Mr. Liscard found it so.

For one thing, Catherine, conscious of the feeble tenure by which she held her present high estate, took infinitely greater pains to amuse and gratify her parent than any other member of the house ever had thought of taking with Lady Caroline's husband—for in that light he had ever been regarded.

Catherine was not only invariably good-humored

and attentive and at his service, but she had little ingratiating offices at command, and little affectionate flatteries on the tip of her tongue whenever opportunity offered. Through her he learned that Mrs. Twopenny, the baker's wife, thought him the youngest-looking gentleman of his years she had ever known, and that Mrs. Jenkins, at the home farm, had heard he had such a power of learning that she was afraid so much as to let fall a word before him.

He had her own assurance of his talents as a whip, coupled with the compliments on the same subject left behind by Emily Gilbert. He heard that he never looked so well as on the box-seat of his phaeton, and that he managed the spirited pair so beautifully that no one need ever be nervous when driven by him.

Naturally the spirited pair came to the door the next day, and Catherine was driven wherever she wanted to go.

Again, with a diligence which neither love of the art nor fear of Miss Penrose had ever been able to incite, the dutiful daughter now mastered such simple ditties as a flute very much out of practice could accomplish; and as Mr. Liscard was really fond of music for its own sake, and had only been discouraged from cultivating it by Lady Caroline's persistent inattention and ignorance, there was no doubt that a resource against *ennui* had now been hit upon.

To Catherine it was, for the present, joy enough merely to play the grown-up person; to sit in the vast saloon and have coffee handed to her along with her father; and to stay up at night until she chose to go to bed.

For this she would have paid a much heavier price than merely drumming on the piano for an hour or so daily; and when, with an easy air, she one day found herself asking for the loan of her father's purse as they drove through the streets of Longminster, and subsequently shopping with it, here and there, all over the place, without his remonstrating, or even seeming to

observe what she was about—so taken up was he with himself, his horses, and his horsemanship—her cup was full, and ran over.

What was it to her that her sister, the beauty, the pride of the neighborhood, lay slowly recovering from the brink of death, feeble, wasted, helpless, unable for the slightest exertion of mind or body, the bloom on her cheeks faded, the round, healthy limbs shrunk and almost powerless, the once vigorous spirit like that of a little child?

Catherine would answer all inquiries in her most cheerful accents.

"Rosamund is ever so much better, thank you. Yes, isn't it a pity she has had to have her hair cut off? But I dare say it will soon grow again." Or, "Aunt Julia says Rosamund is doing as well as we could possibly expect. We have just been to the Abbey. Some of us go over nearly every day." Or, "Rosamund always liked being with Aunt Julia. I dare say she would rather be ill at the Abbey than anywhere else."

If interrogated as to the probable duration of the sick girl's recovery, Catherine would occasionally astonish her interrogator. "When will Rosamund be fit to come home? *Oh, dear*, not for a long, *long* time yet. We have not even seen her yet. Oh, we have not thought about her coming home at all. Aunt Julia says she does not know in the least when she will be fit to be moved even downstairs,—and as for leaving the Abbey, Aunt Julia will keep her as long as ever she possibly can." And it was tolerably obvious that if Aunt Julia were to keep the sick girl altogether, one person at least would find no fault with the arrangement.

"The way that ridiculous Catherine is getting the upper hand in that poor, neglected house really annoys me more than I can tell!" exclaimed Mrs. Waterfield one day, on returning from King's Common, where Catherine had done the honors with an

alacrity and solicitude more than creditable as a performance, but which did not answer so well with every one as with her docile papa. "I confess that to see that mere child sitting perked up in the drawing-room in an afternoon, ordering about, and taking the management of everything—she who ought to be at her grammar and her geography, and would never have been visible at all, had her poor mother or Rosamund been about—it is quite too much for me. The child is insufferable. I can not think where she picked up all that manner. Rosamund had not an atom of it—not at any time,—she was as charming and simple as possible, even when she had begun to be noticed, and made much of ; and, for a wonder, Lady Caroline had the wisdom not to try to improve her. But Catherine is a born actress, and diplomatist. Her coolness, her self-possession, the way she persecutes you with attentions and inquiries—and all the time with such evident satisfaction in her own perfect address and *savoir faire*—I scarcely know how to look. She is a detestable child," quoth the speaker, with energy.

Rosamund, Mrs. Waterfield had been unable to resist, in spite, perhaps, of an involuntary touch of envy, and wonder that the unamiable, uninviting Lady Caroline Liscard should have such a bright and radiant creature belonging to her—but she could let herself out, as it were, about Catherine.

Catherine reigning at King's Common, in all the glory of solitude and prominence, and with obvious forecasting of gay doings and revelry by-and-by, was likely to have advantages and surroundings such as she could not hope to give her girls, and what was Catherine that she should merit such promotion ? If her father went on as he had begun, indeed, the young regent's reign might be short, though merry—but Mrs. Waterfield did not underrate the abilities of the astute damsel ; she did not think that " dear papa " would find himself left altogether free to pick and choose his society. Already Catherine had made

great strides in her ascendancy, and as he was a man certain sooner or later to fall once more under the dominion of petticoat government, if the daughter could only hold her ground for a time she stood an excellent chance of having him completely under her thumb for the future.

No one would have been more indignant at all of this than Lady Julia, had Lady Julia not been entirely engrossed at this period by other and sweeter cares.

It had been all in all to her to nurse, and watch, and brighten, and support the feeble life now struggling back to youth and strength again. To mark the truant color stealing once more over her darling's cheek, as the weeks rolled by; to note the little daily increase of appetite; to hail with delight the lengthened nightly slumbers; to provide dainties and delicacies, and cater amusement sufficiently simple and unexciting—the while in her heart she built anew her lately shattered castle in the air,—all of this afforded such a round of occupation as left neither time nor inclination for much outside the Abbey precincts. Her days were completely filled up, and, in consequence, she scarcely ever went to King's Common, and knew but little of what went on there.

When Catherine would jump down from the phaeton, and run in to her aunt, all eagerness to know about the sort of night dear Rosamund had passed, and the sort of breakfast she had made, who could find a fault with that? When she would rejoin, in answer to her aunt's vague hints that it might be long before the invalid would be able to resume her wonted place as elder daughter and sister, that if only dear Rosamund's life were spared to them, they ought not to mind how long she was in getting well and coming home, nothing could be prettier.

The Gilberts, root and branch, eliminated, love and kindness for human kind once more returned to inhabit the tender-hearted Lady Julia's bosom—animosity and antagonism being foreign bodies in that

soil ; and overflowing as she was now with a thankful, tearful felicity, she only felt ready to pity all others not so happy as herself.

Catherine in consequence got off cheap.

She had but little to do. Her fervent inquiries and congratulations, her ready acquiescence in any little scheme for her sister's comfort, and, above all, her protestations that all was going on well at King's Common, but that, of course, they were very dull, very quiet ("and very respectable, just as they should be," internally commented her auditor)—completely satisfied that good lady's mind : the consequence of which was that the niece stood higher in her aunt's good graces at this period than she had ever done before—or, perhaps was ever likely to do again.

The poor children, however, were no better off under the new *régime* than under the former ones. Their palmiest days had been, indeed, when Gilbert's influence was young, and had been exerted on their behalf ; for now Catherine, flaunting in her new-born state, would no more be troubled with them than would Lady Caroline, or Rosamund,—and even they had not been more firmly convinced of the efficacy of school-room regulations, and the need for the whole remaining eight being invariably kept out of sight and hearing, than was the barely emancipated pupil.

The only difference was that Catherine patronized Miss Penrose, which Rosamund had never done.

Rosamund had been sorry for the little governess, but she had not cared to seek her society ; and in her rampant heyday, it is to be feared the willful girl had done little she had not cared to do. Catherine, however, was now hand in glove with her late preceptress, who, in her turn, would not have been human if she had not enjoyed the turn things had thus taken.

Miss Penrose would be begged to come down to the drawing-room in the evenings, and hear the flute and latest duet—when we may be sure she praised the accompaniment also ; she would be invited to

accompany Catherine on her shopping expeditions to Longminster, when these came to be more frequent than dear papa cared for (and dear papa was never troubled to do anything for which he really had a distaste at this time) ; so there, by Miss Catherine's side in the pony carriage, on a lower seat, would perch the little narrow strip of a governess, taking up next to no room, and feeling quite complacent—since, poor soul, the low seat was indubitably better than none at all, and a drive, and a peep at the gay windows, and helping Catherine to make purchases, and standing by while Catherine talked to acquaintances, better than droning on in that endless grind which had swallowed up so many years of her life at King's Common.

She never refused the holiday, or half-holiday, petitioned for by her late pupil, when the little band had been invited to the Abbey to run riot among Lady Julia's pets, and be stuffed with her good things,—but she and Catherine did not make up the party going there. They would be off to the town, to dressmakers, milliners, and what not—Miss Penrose to inspect and admire, Catherine to price and purchase. So many parcels had never found their way to a carriage belonging to King's Common before.

All this time what was Hartland doing?

Getting acclimatized to the new order of things ; beginning to be a little more cheerful, a little less silent ; to take an imperceptibly growing interest in the state of the fields, the weather, the progress of the new farm-buildings, the stables, the kennels, the spring meetings, and the prospect of the cricketing season.

He was not quite so keen a cricketer as he had been a year or two before—but still he fancied he should not give up his team. He thought he should get together a few good horses, and go in for hunting the following season—there was a prospect of the hunt being improved, and he ought to encourage it. There was still a little shooting, and as Rosamund's

condition continued to improve, shooting men came and went, and made some sort of variety. But still there was more needed.

"He requires an out-and-out thorough change," said his friend Stoneby, one day. "You should pack Hartland off, Lady Julia. He is moping here."

"My dear Mr. Stoneby, I pack Hartland off? Why, nothing on earth would induce him to go. He will not stir from home; he has not slept a night away from the house since—you know when."

"The very reason he should go now."

"I am quite sure he will not go—until Rosamund is better."

"She is out of all danger now, Lady Julia."

"Oh, entirely, dear child; nothing but strength is needed. As soon as she is fit to travel, I propose taking her abroad. Why, to be sure—" and she stopped, and her whole face beamed—"to be sure, if Hartland would go with us—!"

"—No, no, not that," said Mr. Stoneby, smiling and shaking his head. "No, Lady Julia, that would not suffice. That would do no good at all," added he frankly, for he was now drawn by a closer tie than ever to the Abbey inmates, and was known as "Hartland's dear, kind, invaluable friend" there. "Do you not understand," proceeded he, "that that sort of change would simply be no change? Hartland ought to leave behind him every familiar thought, and voice, and face. He ought to breathe a completely new mental atmosphere. He needs this even more than a physical one. For that very reason I have not offered myself—"

"—Oh, if you would!"

"It would not answer; it would not serve our end, Lady Julia. Let him shake off for the time every one and everything with which is connected a painful association. Let him go over the seas, right away—*say to America, across the Rocky Mountains, camp out in the Far West*—you will have him come back

another man. Before he knows, he will find himself disencumbered of all the cobwebs which the last six months have spun around him. He will knock up new acquaintanceships; form new interests; insensibly drop his melancholy, and—wonder what has become of his liver. I assure you, Lady Julia, a great deal of the gloom which still overshadows Hartland—though it has lightened much of late—is due to a very prosaic and inexplicable cause. He is capricious about his food, and neglects his hours. Then, for a long time, he took not a third of his usual exercise. Then, he has had no society—”

“Very true indeed,” assented poor Lady Julia, as meekly as if she had been to blame for it all; “but, Mr. Stoneby, he is so much better than he was.”

“He *is* better: he is getting over it,” replied Jack; “and for that very reason he is fit to go off by himself, and to get all the good of so doing. We could not have trusted him alone till now.”

“And he was too anxious,” and she shot him a glance.

“Yes, of course. To have left you in your anxiety would have been unfeeling—”

“Oh, Mr. Stoneby, you know what I mean.”

“You mean that he was unhappy on his own account?”

“I am sure, certain, that he cares for her. And I had so hoped that when she was able to be downstairs and about, and when they could see each other quietly every day, and she could get to know him and appreciate him—oh, you know, I think you know, what is my greatest hope and prayer—” and the fond, imprudent creature clasped her hands, while the water stood in her eyes.

“My dear lady,” said Jack quietly, “has it ever struck you that perhaps, in the old days, if this event which you so earnestly desire had not been put in motion, and prepared for as it were, it might already have come to pass of itself? Believe me, it does not do to try to pull the strings of destiny—”

"We only thought it would be so nice," murmured she.

Who could proceed with a lecture after that?

"Certainly you understand Hartland as no one else does," conceded Lady Julia, recovering herself; "and Rosamund is not—of course—poor darling, she is thin, and pale, and fragile-looking; and with all her beautiful hair gone, she can not look her best. It *might* be as well that Hartland should not see her just now."

"Quite as well," assented Jack profoundly.

"She will soon be every bit as pretty—as beautiful as ever," added Lady Julia, jealousy in arms at once; "people are very much mistaken who think she is going to be a poor, pale invalid for the rest of her life. Still—for the present, we must be thankful to have her as she is. And if you think Hartland should really go—" and she sighed a sigh of resignation.

It was a little hard to have to give up all the cosy prospect of Rosamund as the most interesting of convalescents, making daily progress under Hartland's care; she had pictured fresh spring mornings, and she had seen the two sauntering hither and thither in the sunshine, she leaning her fragile form upon his stalwart arm, he bending over, all pride and protection; she had seen the happy girl piloted in the broad, low, easy carriage, through green lawns and budding hedgerows—seen the hourly increase of tenderness on the one hand, and confidence on the other, finally ending in the glad avowal—all taking place in her own childhood's home, the home to be also theirs!

Still, if it would be best otherwise, who was she to rebel? Unfortunately she decided to sound Hartland, and find out how he felt in the matter.

As she had foreseen, at first he would hear neither reason nor argument, and stood stoutly out against the idea. He had no need of anything of the kind. He was very well where he was. He was not in the mood for travel. If they liked, he would go up to town for a few days, presently. He would go to Liver-

pool and see the Grand National run. More than that he would not do.

But by degrees the continual droppings, which are said to wear out a stone, had their effect.

Lady Julia, having been brought to perceive that the tempting vision of her two beloveds billing and cooing under her protecting wing was not perhaps the most likely one to prove a reality, nor, if it did, to produce lasting happiness—since the one stood in scarcely less need of care than the other—ended by throwing herself heart and soul into Mr. Stoneby's proposition ; was convinced because he was convinced, and resolute because he was resolute.

When Hartland was restored to full health and vigor, and Rosamund to her home and position—then would be the time for love-making proper to recommence. Her other scheme would now, she saw, with the usual adaptability of her sweet and pliable nature, be not without its drawbacks.

Accordingly she was full to the brim of assurances and prognostications ; called in Mr. Stoneby to supply arguments ; and got hopelessly entangled amidst wilds, deserts, and prairies.

The result, however, was all that was desired.

Hartland was off, and off without seeing his cousin.

"She did not ask to see him, nor he to see her," Lady Julia explained to her confidential adviser thereafter. "Why he did not, I can not tell ; but I think I can guess at dear Rosamund's feelings. Poor child, she does so much dislike the sight of herself in the glass. And I am sure a sweeter face—but the little frilled cap *is* rather trying. I can not honestly say it is becoming, and I hope she will soon be able to dispense with it. Her hair is beginning to show again nicely, and will be quite lovely within a month or two. Still, I think, I do think, it is something to do with that, which makes her shrink from seeing any one ; and when I told her Hartland had sent her his 'good-by,' she seemed rather relieved than otherwise, only a lit-

tle—perhaps a little—disappointed ; but I don't know. One thing, however, she certainly did not ask to see him.”

Not long after the young man's departure, the invalid was pronounced not only fit to be downstairs and out of doors, but to contemplate the trip of which Lady Julia had spoken.

The project accordingly took shape with increased minutes, and at length grew so alluring and so prominent, that a desire—an unmistakable desire—to partake in it began to manifest itself on the part of Rosamund's sister.

Could she be of use in helping to wait upon dear Rosamund ? Could she not run about, and fetch and carry for her ? Could she not save Aunt Julia trouble, write letters, and talk French ? Miss Penrose had always pronounced her the best French scholar in the family, and it would be such a pleasure to talk French for Aunt Julia.

Aunt Julia, however, was not to be tempted. Catherine might be very well at King's Common, and her notable qualities were of service there as keeping all smooth during her sister's enforced absence—so much the good lady was ready to allow ; but beyond that she had no love for her younger niece.

Had Rosamund indeed expressed a wish for her companionship—but Rosamund almost laughed at the suggestion. She and Catherine had never had an idea in common. To Lady Julia she would not now expose her sister, as in old times she had not spared to do, but neither was she going to give in to Catherine yet.

“ If it had been Clemmy Stoneby ! ” she said, and almost before the words had crossed her lips, Clemmy Stoneby it was to be.

“ My dear child, what an excellent, what a *first-rate* idea ! Of course, Clemmy is the very person. She must and shall come. She is devoted to you, and she—I will pay all her expenses—everything. We owe so much to her dear, kind, invaluable brother.

How thankful we should be to have such a young man for our parish clergyman ! And Clementina herself will be quite perfect as a companion. Besides which, I can not rejoice enough at having it in my power to give her the pleasure."

Poor little Clementina was in the seventh heaven when she had received Jack's consent, and all was arranged.

As for Catherine, she made no complaint. A few weeks after the party had started, they received a note from her, dated from the south of France. Dear papa was taking her the most delightful Continental tour ; and she came home with her portmanteaux as full of new dresses and knick-knacks as a bride on her wedding-trip.

It was getting time for Rosamund to be at home again.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SHE HAS HAD HER LESSON.

"Adversity is like the period of the earlier and of the late rain—cold, comfortless, and unfriendly both to men and to animals; yet from thence have their birth the flower and the fruit, the rose, the date, and the pomegranate."—SCOTT.

AT length the truants returned. All alike had grown weary of endless novelty and unlimited idleness, and pined for the familiar sights and sounds, pursuits and pleasures, delights and even the drawbacks of an English home.

The spring and summer had been passed by Lady Julia and her niece in exploring Italian and Swiss resorts, wandering about from one grand old city to another till the heat drove them northward; remaining there for some months among the snow peaks and glaciers; and finally settling down at a German spa, until the life there became unendurable.

Lord Hartland had had a wider experience. He had traveled fast and far; had seen many strange and stirring sights; traversed mighty rivers; camped out in lonely wildernesses; made countless friends, learned much, heard much, thrown his heart and sympathies abroad in all directions; and he entered into every adventure and enterprise with a zest which had brought its own reward.

He was now, as predicted, another man. Moody, melancholy introspection was gone for ever. Unreasonable woe had vanished. The spring of life was all in bud afresh.

He still loved his cousin; he still felt grief and *shame with a chastened pang*, when a wave of recollec-

tion would now and again break over his spirit as from some dead storm ; but, no longer crushed and overwhelmed, he now stood upright, strong to bear the past, and hopeful even of the future.

He would not shun Rosamund, but neither would he sue her.

He thought he could be sure that so far no thought of him as a lover had ever crossed her mind ; and if this were the case, a renewal of the old intercourse could be maintained without danger to either, so long as he kept a watch upon himself.

He did not mean to be too bold. Rosamund, according to her aunt, was now more beautiful, more bewitching than ever, and, added to that, the dearest, *dearest* girl in the world. "You have no idea of the sensation she creates everywhere," wrote Lady Julia. "People are always getting introduced to her; and then they are so angry with me because she refuses to go to their dances, and will not take any part in the amusements that are always going on. This is a very gay place, and there are plenty of pretty girls about, but none to equal Rosamund. So every one says. She can not help being seen, for she is always out and about—looking so lovely in her white frock and hat—and I may confess to *you* what I should not dare to *her*, that sometimes I am tempted to suggest going on the promenade and hearing a little music at the gay hour, because I can not resist showing her off and seeing all the eyes following us. But although she never objects to anything of that sort (not the admiration, but the walking, and sitting under the trees), she can not be persuaded to more. She says she is not strong enough ; and to be sure she is not *very* strong yet, not quite her old, robust self—but between ourselves, I do not feel that that is altogether the reason. I gather that she thinks she ought not to be amusing herself as other girls do, quite as if nothing had happened. Perhaps she is right, *dear child*, and it would be terrible if anything of the kind were

to begin over again. It might, you know. There are one or two here who are most obvious adorers from afar, and would need only the slightest encouragement to be at her feet. It is pretty to see how she avoids them, and yet how anxious she is to be kind to all, and never to hurt nor pain anybody. Oh, Hartland, our darling has had a sore and bitter lesson, but the fruits of it are only too sweet. I almost tremble when I think how dear, how very dear she is to me."

Next it was, "Rosamund and I are at last setting off for England. We shall travel slowly, and probably remain a day or two in London, although no one is there now. But Rosamund wishes to get some autumn things for the children, and to see about a new governess."

Rosamund might have spared her pains. She was informed that the children had all been fitted out before she arrived, and Catherine, armed with her father's authority, had already engaged a French mademoiselle, recommended by some of her new acquaintances.

"We did not know when to expect you," she explained subsequently, "and papa thought it a pity to wait. Lady Belmont assured me it was quite a chance that Mademoiselle Forestier was disengaged; so papa said, write at once."

"Who is Lady Belmont?" demanded the elder sister, with something of an accent on the "who."

"Papa and I met her in Paris. She was so kind to us. We saw a great deal of her there."

"I thought you had only been in Paris for a few days?"

"We saw her on nearly all of them."

"Is she your only reference for this French girl?"

"Certainly," said Catherine, drawing herself up.

"Papa and I felt that we did not require any other. We were quite satisfied."

Quite satisfied! Sixteen and three-quarters was *quite satisfied!* Yet in spite of herself, the cold com-

posure in the speaker's eye made the spirit of the other sink. She had no heart for wars and fighting, she was so longing for peace, and love, and kindness, all round ; so anxious to be just and forbearing even to Catherine, who must ever be a trial and perplexity, that it did seem hard to be confronted with so grave an offense on the very threshold of her return.

But little did she guess how far things had gone !

Now, at every turn, she found herself being informed of new habits, new customs, new laws—all, as could plainly be perceived, of one person's making, yet none of which were owned by her. Oh, dear no ; it was papa who " liked this " ; papa who had " grown accustomed to that " ; papa who " *never* did " such and such a thing now, or who, contrariwise, " *always* did " it.

Papa showed Catherine his letters. Papa expected her in the library after breakfast. Papa could not spare her to do any lessons, so they had never been resumed. She had had to be everything to papa for so long, that he could not now do without her. It is to be feared that the very sound of papa's name grew at last obnoxious in poor Rosamund's ears.

By degrees she saw it all. The younger had supplanted the elder, and taken away her birthright ; and though it must in fairness be added that the birthright in question was one which the latter would never for its own sake have coveted, still she could not stand by and look on, without something of the old, warm blood boiling within.

She had come home fancying that it would never boil again. She had been feeling so humble, so peaceful, so anxious by meek and gentle ways to show her sense of past folly, and resolutions for future amendment ; she had felt as if nothing that might be said of her would be too severe, as if the coldness of friends, the condemnation of the world, and the stares of the village folks would be only her meet punishment,—and had by reflection and prayer strengthened her soul to bear all.

But this peculiar form of retribution was precisely what had not been expected.

It must be remembered that the Catherine known to Rosamund in days gone by had been but a poor creature, at whom she had been used to laugh, and flout when a child, and turn her back upon when a woman. In no other character had she beheld her sister, until now. During her convalescence, caresses, inquiries, and profuse solicitude had been the order of the day, while not a word had been said to her of the triumphal progress the emancipated school-room miss was making to the top of the tree. All had been carefully kept in the background ; and now the grand result of the whole broke over the head of the returned wanderer like a thunder-clap. Catherine was all in all.

Mr. Liscard, no longer a cipher, but applauded, flattered, and put forward, was by no means inclined to think meanly of any one who gave him such an excellent opinion of himself. Catherine's judgment—since it invariably coincided with his own—was eagerly sought, and pronounced invaluable. He and Catherine could manage everything between them ; and perhaps it was but natural that he should add peevishly, that Rosamund had no business to interfere.

"But it is about the children that I mind most," the latter confided to her aunt. "I did so hope to do better for my poor little sisters and brothers than was—was done for me. I may say that to you, may I not? You will understand. But this Mademoiselle Forestier is not the right person for them at all ; and yet she is so backed up by papa and Catherine that I can do nothing. They are too strong for me," and Rosamund's lip trembled.

"Too strong for my Rosamund !" said her aunt gayly. "Nay, my darling, be patient, and do your best. These trials often pass quickly. And you *are the eldest daughter—mistress of your father's house—*"

—"Neither of these now," said Rosamund sadly. "I have forfeited my claim to everything, I think. My father almost tells me so. Catherine openly shows it. Even the little Frenchwoman follows their lead. As Catherine engaged her and received her, she all but declines to take so much as a message from any one else. The other day, when I spoke about something I wished to have altered, she looked at me calmly, and said, 'Et Mademoiselle Catherine?'"

"You should speak to your father."

"I have. It did no good."

She did not add that it had done harm,—that Mr. Liscard had testily rejoined that really it was a pity she had come home to disturb every one; and that, as she had been so happy with her aunt, he should recommend her returning to make the Abbey her home, and leaving them to their own quiet ways.

The cruel taunt had pierced deeply, and could be breathed to no one.

Her place, whether for good or ill, was now, Rosamund felt, beneath her parent's roof, and though many if not most of her days were spent with Lady Julia, she made a rule of carefully returning every night, and pursuing her quiet round, as though settling down at King's Common for years to come.

This had gone on for some weeks, when one fine September morning Hartland, bronzed, reddened, big, bright, and hearty, reappeared like a great sun rising on the neighborhood.

He had been missed by all, and by none more than his young cousins; and their tumultuous greeting and demonstrations—for they had their first sight of his tall figure approaching through the park, while at play there in a holiday hour—acted as a sort of shield for the meeting which had been alike longed for and dreaded by two of the group.

Rosamund had been sitting a little apart; the day was warm, and there was but a faint tint in her cheeks. He thought she did not look as well as he had ex-

pected, and that the little hand which rested for a moment in his felt small and thin. He told his aunt afterward that, in his opinion, his cousin had a good deal of leeway yet to make up ere she could regain what she had lost. He told himself that he had done very well; got over the first sight of her bravely; and could feel confidence in his hold over his heart for the future.

Foolhardy mortal! Lady Julia needed not to have sighed so dolefully as he left the room—nor Catherine to have simpered and bridled, and been sure that Hartland had come home more delightful than ever, because he had addressed to her the chief part of his travel talk. The old spell was at work before any of them knew—before he knew himself.

First of all recommenced the old habit of walking in and out of King's Common at all hours and seasons; then there would be long lingerings in the dusk, when by chance Rosamund was met in the gardens, or shrubberies; long talks in the bay-window, waiting for the driving party, who, it not infrequently happened, would be late in coming back (Catherine liking much to look in for her tea at this house and the other in the neighborhood); and instant recollections of Lady Julia's waiting for him, and speedy departure, immediately the room filled.

To be sure, the cousins were not quite so easy together as they had used to be; and instead of boldly claiming her company for a stroll, as he had been wont to do, Hartland must needs now maneuver to get it, and look black, and utter not a word, if frustrated. He would not say openly "Two's company, three's none," as he had not scrupled to do the year before, when desirous of getting rid of Catherine, who was no more a favorite with him than with her sister—but he would hearken diligently to any plans let fall, and base his line of operations accordingly.

Catherine used to wonder how it was that they had invariably missed him, when she and her father had

been out on one of their long afternoon excursions. At such times he would be over early, and he would stay late. He would not quit the side of her whom he had come to see—no, not for a moment. Out of doors, if a child ran up and pressed between them, he would lift it aside; within, whatever seat she took, he would draw his near. As the time passed, he would press still closer, take an interest in the book she had been reading, the work she had been doing, in anything that enabled him to lean over her chair, and make her turn her head his way.

His voice would be low and soft ; he would halt before her name,—and yet the name would be oftener on his lips than perhaps it should have been. He did not talk to Rosamund about his travels, and his new friends, and new experiences, as he did to Catherine or to Dolly,—it seemed as if he had nothing to say about them to this other auditor—as if for her he had her own topics.

And when the long, dreamy, desultory *tête-à-tête* would at last be rudely broken in upon by the return of the driving party, noisy and merry, the Hartland who rose and straightened himself up, at their approach, would be quite another person than Rosamund's companion in the low chair during the past hour or two.

He would seldom be induced to stop on.

An evening at King's Common meant not only being usurped by one or other of the two who had no attractions for him, but a growing indignation on another's behalf. But little perception was needed to understand how matters stood in the readjusted household, and, guided by Lady Julia, he could hardly go wrong. He felt dangerous on the subject, and being a peaceable man, thought it best to avoid explosive opportunities.

But he got to know better and better at what times Rosamund would be alone, and the spots she haunted; and I fear me he somewhat avoided his friend Jack

Stoneby at this time, good cause as he had to love and bless Jack.

Stoneby, of course, saw plainly enough what was coming, and was not, upon the whole, certain of what he himself desired.

He desired Hartland's happiness, and Rosamund's happiness ; and what with time and absence, and the never having had any hopes for himself, joined to the advent of a very nice and pretty and amiable young lady in the neighborhood, he was able quite cheerfully to unite the two in his mind—but he did feel he should have liked to have had some sign from Gilbert first.

For some weeks after Gilbert's departure, while Rosamund still lay hovering between life and death, Stoneby had conscientiously fulfilled his promise of letting her former lover know her state, and had duly received a few words of thanks in reply to each communication. From these he had learned that Major Gilbert had exchanged into a regiment ordered to Burmah, and the last note received from him had been from the frontier there.

There he was, and there he was likely to be for long enough—doing a little fighting, and running odds and ends of risks; but the great war for which his soul thirsted was nowhere to be found. The world was usually quiet a dozen years ago.

"I wish he could see some action," said Jack to himself, as he folded up the latest missive, "it would do Gilbert more good than anything; and perhaps if that were to intervene between him and his past disappointment, what with activity and hard work, and all the things he would have to think of and to do, he would learn to judge more kindly of poor Hartland, and be able to send him a message. The worst of it is, that I fear the whole thing will slip from his memory. These sort of affairs take so little hold of a man engaged in active life; and he will naturally not care to recall this more than he can help. He *may have got somebody else by this time,*" added the

young man, with a little nod to himself—and he went and paid a visit to his “somebody else,” that very afternoon.

It was a mild, showery day, almost too warm for the time of year, and with no suggestion of the blustering autumn winds yet in store.

Rosamund, wandering about among the late roses in the old, unfashionable rosery at the bottom of the garden, was hidden from view between the tall briary hedges, and somewhat sharply taxed for being so by Catherine, who at four o'clock came to seek her, post-bag in hand.

“You knew the afternoon post would be coming in,” she said. “It is too bad of you to give me all this run after you.”

“I never asked you to run after me”; and the speaker's tone added, “nor did I want you to do it.”

“I supposed you would like to have your letters.”

“You supposed you would like to know what was in them.” Rosamund could yet turn the tables in a neat retort, and, truth to tell, she did not allow herself to get altogether out of practice. She did not care two straws about her letters that day, and she did care about being left to her rose-garden solitude, and perhaps just a little also about another interruption to it which had now and again happened before, and which might as likely as not happen again,—but which Catherine's presence would inevitably mar. “I don't suppose they are of any consequence,” she added, holding out an ungracious hand.

“Oh, but they are—at least, they are very interesting to look at from the outside,” said Catherine, prudently waiving further discussion, and the risk of a quarrel, for the sake of gratifying her curiosity. “They look like invitations.”

They were invitations. The October shooting dinner-parties were now being arranged, and people generally were beginning to think that King's Common had done its part in the way of mourning and

retirement, and that the widower was ready to be consoled, or at any rate to be beguiled, by the seductions of a little neighborly society.

One and all had concluded that at any rate he might be tried; and Rosamund also might be tried.

It was said that she did not mean to go out—that would be ridiculous. Every one knew that the poor girl had suffered enough; and she was so young, and had been so neglected (poor Lady Caroline!), that it would be cruel to visit her sins heavily on her head.

And undoubtedly there would be also something interesting in Rosamund Liscard just now, which would add to her attractions in the eyes of all who heard her story,—something to whisper about and nod about,—something to make a hostess grateful for. So that, considering how seldom it is that a poor county lady, buried in respectability and domestic interests, has even the faintest flavor of spice to throw into her ingredients for a shooting dinner-party, the writers of the several gilt-edged notes which Catherine now eagerly produced may be pardoned if they were a little early in the day in sending them, and a little anxious about their acceptance.

"Mr. and Miss Liscard," read out she enviously, as they were opened one by one. "I suppose you will go? I could hardly go till next spring, unless—I shall be seventeen, you know, directly; so that if you—"

"There, take them! They are all of the same order," cried her sister, hastily thrusting the packet back upon her. "You can ask papa about them. Ask him now, if you like. He is at home—"

"—No, he is not; he is gone for his walk."

"He went in this minute,—I saw him. He had forgotten a letter he had to write."

"And what am I to ask him?"

"About these, of course," impatiently. "What is to be done about them? I think myself that it is too

soon for us to dine out yet; but I will do as he wishes. Say I will go if he wants me to go."

"I *could* go, you know, if you--"

"Well, go then,—you may go for me—"

"Do you really mean that? May I consult with papa?"

"Yes, consult with papa—go in now and consult with him—oh, that will do," as Catherine's mouth was opening to begin again, "I tell you, you may go if you want; only do not stand arguing and expounding there—" the words were scarcely out of her lips, ere their astonished auditor, in terror of a revocation, and already conning over the means by which she could with propriety carry out so delightful a permission (she did not mind in the least Rosamund's being cross over it), sped off like the wind, and the latter's end was attained.

She was alone, and only a large black-edged envelope remained in her hand, which neither the one sister nor the other dreamed could contain anything worth any one's waiting for.

It was probably some milliner's or dress-maker's bill, and the person chiefly interested in these did not covet over-much being present when one of them came in. Her spring orders had been tolerably extensive, and had somewhat startled even herself by the sum total to which they had mounted,—she would not, on account of some tiresome shopwomen, delay seeking out dear papa and telling him what Rosamund had said (it was a way of Catherine's always to father a sentiment of her own on somebody else, when possible) and accordingly she was well out of sight ere the other absently undid the fastenings of the despised document.

The next moment saw it despised no longer.

"Emily Gilbert!" she exclaimed aloud, as the signature in large letters caught her eye,—“Emily Gilbert! And writing to me! What is it—what can it be?"

With feverish haste her eye flew over the page, and the blood seemed to surge back from her heart.

He was dead—the man who had loved and lost her.

Dead! She paused to think, to understand. Dead! How dead? *Dead!* Yes, the words were there, unmistakably there.

He had been killed in a night sortie among the frontier mountains, some weeks before. Some weeks before! And she—she had never heard, had never been told, and had been going on her way, contented and happy, even beginning to—to—her cheek burned all over with a deep crimson flush.

Gilbert dead—some time dead—and she had not even mourned him!

That, for a few moments, swallowed up every other thought and emotion.

But how had she not heard—how not known?

The writer explained that only now had her poor brother's effects arrived at his sorrowing home, and that she thought it probable Miss Liscard had not noticed the record of his death in the newspaper, there having been a mistake in the name which no one had cared to rectify till too late. She now only intruded, poor Emily wrote—a mournful indignation shadowing itself forth beneath the humility—she only intruded because the enclosed had been found among her brother's papers. As the enclosed had been addressed to Miss Liscard, she had felt that Miss Liscard would like to have it, or that at least they ought to send it.

In the whole there was a pitiful attempt at dignity which was hardly successful. Just where the brother would have succeeded, the sister failed.

Rosamund, however, was in no mood to carp. The strange, sudden, terrible tidings were enough; the little packet with her name upon it in writing once so familiar—could she have eyes for aught beside?

The paper had a dark-red stain upon it.

"Dear," it ran, "I feel to-night, although I know

not why, as if I must write one word to you for the last—last time. I had never meant that you should hear from me again,—but neither will you, unless the strange forebodings which have haunted me so unceasingly of late prove to be true. I will bear this in my bosom, and only by my death, shall it find its way to you. It may be a weak fancy; Rosamund, but I seem to feel that the end is coming at last, and coming soon. I have not sought death, but neither have I shunned it. I have hoped for it, and expected it, and I think I shall have it perhaps before many hours are over. There has been an outbreak among the natives here, and who knows to what extent the mischief may not have spread? It is a wild, dark night, and we are going out upon the hills in search of the rebels. They tell me these rebels give no quarter. Why should they? We give them none. . . . Oh, Rosamund, Rosamund, why are you with me, day and night, day and night now? I am looking at you as I write. I see you standing there in the dim light. I hear your voice; I almost feel your breath. Where are you? I wonder what you are doing. I wonder if you are happy. My dear, if my love would have made you so, you had it all,—you have it now: whether I live or die, I am yours only, and yours wholly. But mine was not enough. Be Hartland's wife then, if you can love him. I know he loves you. Marry him, and remember that this is what I wish and desire. I no longer doubt him; I feel convinced that I never ought to have doubted him, and you must tell him so,—when he tells you, as he will, what once I felt. I have written to him a few words also. He may like to have them straight from me. Why need I mind saying more? I shall have left this world if your eye ever falls upon these pages, and why should I not tell you that I humbly hope I shall have left it for a better? Rosamund, by the grace of God the ruin of my earthly happiness has been the means of leading me to seek it from higher source. I turned to my Maker, and he

heard me, and will receive me. May he bless you, preserve you, keep you, make you happy here and hereafter—" The writing ended in a pale smear : a summons had come in haste, and the hand that had dropped the pen had lain stiff and powerless ere the morrow's light had dawned.

With bursting sighs and blinding tears she hung over the page, at times invisible and almost incomprehensible. How often had she wondered what would be the end?—what the years would bring?—whether he would forget?—would suffer his wound to be gently healed?—would ever again cross her path?

And now in that far-off clime he had fallen—not gloriously as in the field, leading his men to victory, with the sound of trumpet and the clang of arms,—but in some dismal, unknown spot, nameless and unhonored. To this her hand had driven him! Great heaven! was she never to come to the end of that harvest of her thoughtless sowing?

True, his sorrow had brought him a rich return, but in that she had had no share. The one had been of her making, but not the other; and can we blame her if at the moment this was the pang that was uppermost?

A step upon the gravel—a voice in her ear. "I think," said a man's deep undertone, subdued to tenderness unmistakable—"I think, Rosamund, that we have both heard the same tidings. . . . Shall I show you mine?" But she scarcely knew whether his arm enfolded her, or whether she clung to him; whether he or she held the new letter; or whether she read with his eyes or her own.

"You are a man of honor," it ran. "If I ever tried to doubt it, time and reflection have proved too strong for me. But I think I always believed in you, Lord Hartland—though it was a kind of opiate to my pain to resolve that I did not. To-night I go into action, and before going I shall write to Rosamund."

Show her this. Win her if you can. Make her happy."

The command has been obeyed on the instant.

* * * * *

... "Have I made you happy?" said Hartland, a few years afterward. "Have I done all I ever hoped and vowed to do? Is there anything you desire, anything I can give you, anything that would make my Rosamund happier? What? There is? Speak, dearest—I can trust you. You have but to name your wish. You shall go where you will, do what you will—"

The answer came so low that he could scarcely catch it—

"I want to see his grave."

A few words in conclusion about the other personages who have played their part before our readers.

And first for Lady Julia. Her cup was now full to the brim, and would have run and bubbled over, but for the little daily friction occasioned by the sight of Catherine reigning unchecked, and in all her glory, at King's Common. Had she known how long that reign was to last—extending until the very sight of her name as Miss Liscard became odious in the eyes of the thin-visaged, sharp-voiced spinster, suitor after suitor having been frightened away by her ill-concealed shrewishness, and the subjection of her only remaining parent—even Aunt Julia would have been satisfied. As it was, it was perhaps really as well that the good aunt had that crumpled rose-leaf, all the rest of her bed was so wondrous easy.

Rosamund, with a chastened spirit and nobler views of life, growing ever gentler and tenderer, while regaining yearly more and more of the radiance of her youth in the sunshine of such a home, was perhaps the first darling of her heart. But Hartland was a close second—and deserved it. He, too, could never show her affection enough.

Mr. Liscard never re-entered the married state, getting on fairly well without a second wife,—though it was said of him that he never again had so good a time as during that first year of his widowhood, and more especially during the first three months of it.

Mrs. Waterfield, on hearing of Rosamund's new engagement, made no remark of any kind, not choosing to animadvert, and perhaps not feeling drawn toward exhibiting any very exuberant demonstrations of pleasure. Perhaps these could hardly have been expected of her. Diana was out, too, by this time.

Jack Stoneby married well and happily, but kept his secret—a secret of which neither Lord nor Lady Hartland ever had the slightest suspicion—to the end of his life.

Clementina also married, having found out that the next best thing to a devoted brother is a devoted husband.

Billy Barley throve apace, and had to be incessantly watched and scolded, or he would have had a dip in the mill-dam again as regularly as the summer came round, in spite of his father's pride in pointing at him and saying, "Ay, it's nought but a corp that boy there o' ours would ha' been this day, if it hadn't been for one of the grandest gentlemen i' the land, who's gone himself now—the Lord bless his memory."

It was said of Lady Hartland in after years, that nothing was more beautiful and touching than the care with which she began to train her little troop of high-spirited sons and daughters, even from their cradles.

It was one of the rules of her life to mark and learn the character of each child, to win the confidence of all, and give her own in return.

She never sought to master them by sheer dint of strength and will, nor to override them with the upper hand, still less to provoke them by her prejudices and unreasonableness to assert their crude and immature judgments in defiance of her own.

But what was perhaps more effectual than even this, was the humility and readiness with which, so soon as she found herself mistaken, or learned that she had been in error, Rosamund was willing to avow it.

Such example could not fail to have more effect than any amount of precept ; and it is therefore not to be wondered at that the children of such a mother, though by no means likely to become either a tame or timid crew, were yet tolerably sure never to be spoken nor thought of as *A Stiff-necked Generation*.

THE END.

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1. The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the United States. It is argued that the study of the history of the United States is essential for a full understanding of the country and its people. The author points out that the history of the United States is a complex and multifaceted one, and that it is important to study it from a variety of perspectives. The author also points out that the study of the history of the United States is important for the development of a sense of national identity and pride.

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Table 1. Mean (SD) age, height, weight, and body mass index (BMI) of the 100 children in the study

Age (years)	Height (cm)	Weight (kg)	BMI (kg m ⁻²)
Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
10.2 (0.5)	142.5 (10.5)	38.5 (12.5)	24.2 (4.5)

children were recruited from a local primary school and a local youth club. The children were recruited to the study by their parents and the children themselves. The children were recruited to the study by their parents and the children themselves. The children were recruited to the study by their parents and the children themselves.

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